

E-mail Update 1/1/09

HAPPY NEW YEAR, WATCHDOGS!

In This Issue:

1. In Case You Missed it...
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3. True Leadership.
4. Small Business Blues.
5. Of Roads, Bridges, Vikings, Jobs, and Wealth.

1. In Case You Missed It.

The Holiday Season is undoubtedly a time for folks to step back from the day-to-day grind and enjoy friends and family. Thus, the Holiday Season is also a time for politicians to air the dirty laundry because they know many taxpayers won't be paying attention. Too bad for them, the Dog is always on the watch!

If you were off the grid last week, you missed a barnburner email update that exposed both Good Ol' Boy Scott LeDoux and another member of the Watchdog's watch list, former state Rep. Kathy "override" Tingelstad. Check it out!

Update: The Watchdog spoke to one influential legislator this week who was absolutely appalled by LeDoux's mismanagement of the Combative Sports Commission (CSC). Speaking of the CSC, the legislator said, "It's got to go." What? Scott LeDoux down to one government paycheck? The humanity!

2. Board Boys Belt Bulges.

The Good Ol' Boys on the County Board never miss a chance to cop some free media. So it was no surprise when GOB Dennis Berg showed up this week in the Pioneer Press to feign some grief regarding the reduction in state aid the County absorbed as a result of the budget deficit the state is facing (in part because of a squandered \$2.2 billion state budget surplus).

The article set a solemn and somber tone by observing, "A recent cut in funding from the state and the likelihood that cuts will continue next year have officials saying that sweeping belt-tightening measures are needed."

Really? So what belt tightening can we expect from the Board? They recently rewarded themselves with a pay raise. Moreover, the Watchdog has learned from County sources that Board members are continuing to junketeer despite budget cuts. The source reports that both Scott LeDoux and GOB Godfather Dan Erhart are planning out-of-state junkets this month.

And remember all the travel and meals paid with County credit cards? The same source reports that Anoka County has a whopping 500 credit cards issued. The

outrageous spending by county commissioners may just be the tip of a very large and very rotten iceberg. Will the County conduct an audit of its credit card practices? Okay, you can stop laughing.

So when Board Chair Dennis Berg speaks of belt tightening, he is obviously referring to people below the Board on the county food chain. Way to share the pain, guys. Way to set the example and inspire the troops.

3. True Leadership.

While Anoka County government is led by a majority of unresponsive, greedy, and self-serving commissioners, Watchdogs should be aware of the leadership provided by commissioners Rhonda Sivarajah and Robyn West. These two ladies, despite being in a minority, have consistently fought the good fight on behalf of the taxpayers they represent. Even though they are frequently on the wrong side of many 5-2 votes, they continue to persevere on your behalf.

The Iron Ladies of Anoka County have again demonstrated their commitment to good government by refusing to accept the pay raise the Board recently bestowed upon themselves. They have shown true leadership by example when it would be very easy to join the other 5 in taking a deeper snoutful of the public trough.

Contact the Iron Ladies and let them know you appreciate their leadership!

Oh, by the way, also feel free to contact the other five and ask them how they plan to spend the pay increase you the taxpayer have been forced to finance.

4. Small Business Blues.

While our Gang of Five down at the courthouse busies themselves with pay raises, junkets, and credit cards, the backbone of America's economy is taking a savage beating at the hands of a merciless recession.

That backbone, of course, is our small businesses. According to the National Federation of Independent Business (NFIB), more than a quarter of their surveyed members said the current economy is threatening their ability to survive.

While Wall Street and Detroit have grabbed the headlines, the pain being felt by small business should give everyone a much larger cause for concern.

Defined as businesses with fewer than 500 employees, these companies and firms contribute in a major way to our economy. Consider these facts about small businesses:

Represent 99.7% of all firms with 2 or more employees; Employ nearly 50% of all private sector employees; Pay nearly 45% of the total U.S. private payroll; Have generated 60-80% of the net new jobs annually over the last decade; Create more than

half of the non-farm private Gross Domestic Product (GDP); Hire 40% of high-tech workers; Make up 97.3% of all exporters.
Source: Small Business Administration.

Our elected officials had better think twice before raising taxes on these beleaguered engines of economic growth. To do so would indeed be killing the goose that lays the golden egg.

Needless to say, most small businesses aren't giving pay raises and taking junkets these days.

<http://s.wsj.net/article/SB123025114273834377.html>

5. Of Roads, Bridges, Vikings, Jobs, and Wealth.

Okay, we've got a classic for you. As the Dog has told you, Zygmunt and his Merry Band of Boat Boys will be looking for a new football field this coming legislative session.

Now ol' Zygmunt is greedy but he's far from stupid. He knows he needs a whopper of a story to feed the taxpayers (via mouthpiece Sid Hartman) about why it's a good deal to shell out taxpayer funds for a stadium while we're \$5 billion in the soup.

Said whopper has now been revealed. According to the stadium propaganda site, Minnesota Momentum, a taxpayer-subsidized stadium is a good deal because it will create jobs and magically boost our economy!

Folks, we've been here before. The proposed stadium site, where the current Metrodump is located, never did attract the kind of development that was promised back in the 80s. What will a new stadium bring? A new Hubert's?

Let's get serious. If government is going to embark on a debt-leveraged public works program, the program should be directed towards repairing and improving the nation's aging, crumbling infrastructure, particularly our road and bridge network.

Updating our roads and bridges will yield short and long-term benefits. In the short term, people out of work will be put to work. In the long-term, the economy will benefit from a transportation infrastructure that is safer, more reliable, and more efficient. When goods can get to market faster and safer, the economy benefits.

So when the Zygster comes to Saint Paul with his snake oil hucksters, you can contact your representatives to let them know you want scarce tax dollars spent on true public projects, not a private football palace.

Now before we go, the Watchdog feels compelled to offer a cautionary tale regarding government "jobs" programs.

While it is true that these programs can employ people with certain skill sets and provide a benefit to the public, they are not true “jobs” programs.

This is because government can't create jobs. Why? Because jobs are only truly created when new wealth is created to finance that job. Since government can't create wealth, government can't create jobs.

Remember that government spends money only by taking that money out of the private economy. Put another way, when government taxes a dollar to “create” a job, it has taken a dollar out of the private economy that is no longer available to the private economy.

Keep that in mind this coming year as government elites bombard you with talk of “job creation” programs.

E-mail Update 1/9/09

In This Issue:

1. And They're Off!
2. Holiday From Reality.
3. Comic Relief.
4. Constituent Services.
5. Quote of the Week.

1. And They're Off!

Tuesday at high noon, the 86th Minnesota Legislature was sworn in. As usual, the Dog will be giving you, the loyal reader, outstanding coverage with a focus on both Anoka County legislators and Anoka County issues. Our sources in Saint Paul are second to none, so be sure to sign up for our weekly email updates as well check the web site on a regular basis.

<http://www.anokacountywatchdog.com/index2.htm>

Moreover, don't forget to visit the legislature's home page as well. The legislature has an excellent site chock full of good information. Moreover, you paid for the web site anyway so you may as well get your monies worth.

www.house.mn

The week at the Capitol was expectedly uneventful with the majority of time devoted to internal organization and ceremonial stuff. The coming weeks will no doubt see some legislative fireworks but the next big explosion will come January 27 when the governor releases his proposed budget. By the way, Watchdog sources within the Governor's office are telling the Dog the current fiscal year budget deficit will be bigger than the \$426 million the governor just solved last month. When the next budget forecast is issued in February, expect the deficit for the current fiscal year to be another \$200 million or so larger, which will require further immediate action.

By the way, expect the next biennial budget deficit to move from about \$4.8 billion to upwards of \$5.5 billion. Time for some good ol' fashioned reform!

2. Holiday From Reality.

While our public schools are fresh off a two-week holiday, the union that represents the teachers is still on a holiday – from reality. Education Minnesota, the teacher's union, is ballyhooing tough talk from the union president that education funding should be utterly exempt from any budget cutbacks. With K-12 education spending comprising 40% of the state's general fund budget, exempting education from any reductions is just about impossible.

Of course, the self-righteous chest thumping from the union prez was long on rhetoric and short on practical solutions, especially specifics on what should be cut or what

taxes should be raised in order to insulate teachers from the reality everyone else is feeling.

What makes the union's statement even more laughable is that DFL legislative leaders, who are the biggest beneficiaries of teacher union political money, have made clear that education funding cuts are definitely on the table. Is health care funding going to take a bigger hit so education funding can skate? Not in the DFL world!

Pop quiz. What politician, when asked in public schools should be held harmless from cuts, said, "I don't see how it can be. It's 40% of the budget." Tim Pawlenty? Marty Seifert? No and no. The answer is Senator Larry Pogemiller, DFL Majority Leader and one of Minnesota's most liberal pols.

<http://www.educationminnesota.org/news/ednews/Pages/cuts.aspx>

Good luck!

3. Comic Relief.

The Star Tribune reports this week that our intrepid gang of good ol' boys is hard at work down at the county courthouse figuring out ways to keep the county books balanced. The article assured us that our commissioners are hard at work cipherin' numbers to find a way to keep the airline tickets and meal tickets flowing.

We read that the county is so concerned about the finances that it has decided to revive the long-dormant "Fiscal Control Committee." Apparently the board wants to put the budget on something akin to double secret probation.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YbN_MAUbLPM

Where to begin with this one? First, isn't the seven-member board the fiscal control committee? If not, just why the hell do we pay them? Second, does this mean that the county isn't concerned about fiscal control when the committee is dormant? Looks like this committee will do little more than give 3 of the 7 commissioners more influence over the very thing that is most important – the spending decisions.

Moreover, the committee is made up of commissioners Erhart, Berg, and Kordiak. Yeah, that's a crew with a ton of fiscal street cred. Taxpayers can rest easy at night knowing Dan Erhart is in charge of keeping spending in line. Hey guys, let's have our first meeting at the Lexington! And the second one at Billy's! And the third one in Phoenix! And the fourth one in DC! At the airport, we'll all buy candy bars and toothbrushes – at taxpayer expense! Oh yeah, we can also use that taxpayer-funded county newsletter to tell everyone about our committee with the cool name that won't really do anything meaningful.

Without commissioners Sivarajah and West, the "committee" is just window dressing. The headline should have read, "Fox to Oversee Hen House."

<http://www.startribune.com/local/north/37186909.html>

4. Constituent Services.

Anoka County's pugnacious pugilistic politician strikes again. Just a week after being chastised by the Legislative Auditor for his mismanagement of the punch and kick commission, LeDoux makes the email update again for his treatment of the very folks who put him in office.

<http://www.auditor.leg.state.mn.us/fad/2008/fad08-36.htm>

Early this week, the Watchdog received an email from an Anoka County resident who incurred LeDoux's, and his old lady's, wrath. Team LeDoux apparently wasn't pleased that this person had dared criticize Scott's crack political leadership.

So what does any self-respecting politician do in the face of criticism? Of course! Have your wife write a snotty, condescending reply email!

In order to protect the identity of the person and the subject matter in question, the Dog will not post the email. Instead, we'll share some choice quotes from Mrs. LeDoux to give you a sampling of what LeDoux considers "constituent services":

"Stay focused."

"Have you ever heard the adage it takes money to make money?"

"Did it ever occur to you that people accused of junketeering are going to places like Washington to obtain the money you need to run the county?"

"Do you even know what portion of the budget comes from the state and feds?"

"It would be well to remember the wisdom you might have missed in 2nd grade."

"This really shows your agenda."

"Let me inform you of the facts."

"I hope I make myself clear."

"You have a tendency to follow blindly."

"C'mon now, think hard."

And the award for Ms. Congeniality goes to.....Carol LeDoux!

5. Quote of the Week.

“There is no chance.”

Minnesota House Speaker Margaret Anderson Kelliher regarding the possibility of a taxpayer-funded Vikings stadium this year.

Now that’s a great start to the session!

<http://www.startribune.com/local/west/36983709.html>

E-mail Update 1/16/09

HAPPY NEW YEAR, WATCHDOGS!

In This Issue:

1. State of Restraint.
2. Just Call it BS.
3. Storm the Beach!
4. Per Diem Watch.
5. Quote of the Week.

1. State of Restraint.

The Dog has to admit the legislature has been eerily quiet since the session kicked off January 6th. Most committee meetings have been cancelled and floor sessions in both bodies have been relatively mild. Our sources say legislators seem shell-shocked by the massive deficit and a bunker mentality pervades the halls of the Capitol.

That all changed yesterday as Governor Pawlenty delivered his annual State of the State address to a joint House-Senate convention yesterday. Pawlenty offered a bold, aggressive agenda that highlighted his budget priorities, thus offering a preview of what to expect when his budget is formally delivered January 27th. The major areas of focus were:

Fiscal Restraint. Pawlenty made clear that he opposes tax increases to resolve the budget problem. He correctly observed that tax increases take from the already strained family budget in order to give to the government budget. With families, businesses, and non-profits cutting back on their budgets, government ought to be doing the same. Raising taxes in the face of a deep recession is simply dumb economic policy.

Having said that, the Watchdog will be carefully following fee increases, which hit taxpayers just as hard. The state has jacked up fees (with both parties to blame) by millions of dollars recently. These fees are nothing more than a backdoor tax increase.

Encouraging Job Growth. The governor rightly called for a steep cut in the corporate tax rate. Business taxes kill jobs and provide a perverse incentive for businesses to take jobs to more favorable places, like the 47 states that have a lower business tax rate than Minnesota's. If Minnesota is to be competitive in attracting business, tax rates need to be competitive.

What's interesting is that Pawlenty called for a cut in the corporate tax rate. It isn't clear if he is also calling for a cut in individual tax rates. This is important because most businesses in Minnesota file their taxes under the individual, not the corporate, tax structure. In essence, the biggest corporations file under the corporate rate and most

small businesses file as individuals. Since small business is the main driver of job growth, a cut in individual taxes would help most.

Wage Freeze. Striking a blow for common sense, the governor called for a two-year wage freeze for state employees, which will no doubt be greeted with howls of protest from the government union crowd, which has always had a tenuous connection with reality. These union leaders shouldn't count on the DFL majorities for cover, however. Watchdog sources say that many DFL legislators understand that state employees can't be exempted from the reality of budget trimming.

More importantly, the governor called for wage freezes for all local units of government that receive state money, including Anoka County. No doubt, that news is going over like a fart in church down at the courthouse, where the gang of 5 just gave away fat pay raises to employees and themselves (Sivarajah and West voting no).

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<http://m1e.net/c?67117810-r4oWq9T2wPJA%403902208-2a7PDF90YQVDM>

The Guv also ought to demand a suspension of junketeering as well. Don't think that the worst economy since 1929 is going to separate Dan Erhart from the buffet line. It's going to take an intervention from Saint Paul to stop these guys from eating, flying, and buying toothbrushes and Hershey bars with your money.

<http://m1e.net/c?67117810-01.sJoJNsOY16%403902209-vCGMdUiKTP2bE>

Of course, the DFL reaction was long on criticism and short on solutions. DFL leadership has thus far offered no plan of their own beyond expressing some real gosh darn fond hope that Santa Obama will fly into the North Star state with a sleigh full monopoly money financed by the Chinese to be paid off by our kids and grandkids. Hey Democrats, whatever happened to pay as you go (PAYGO)?

<http://m1e.net/c?67117810-5wqmsrXahlI7w%403902210-eg76wPHEYvjmE>

<http://m1e.net/c?67117810-bDzc42La2Xam2%403902211-hDmhF4zx1kNJE>

Kudos to DFL state Representative Tom Rukavina for at least being honest and upfront about his plan to raise income taxes on every Minnesotan.

<http://m1e.net/c?67117810-W5i.tcDfgMBRw%403902212-/fQT608CYktNI>

To see the entire State of the State address, click here:

<http://m1e.net/c?67117810-et5mMCF1Zj0.M%403902213-eyVq.jlchGBlo>

2. Just Call it BS.

As the budget debate heats up, you'll be hearing plenty of talk about how the rich in Minnesota aren't paying their fair share and how the poor are bearing the load.

Accusations of Pawlenty shielding the rich while hammering the poor will abound in the "comment" sections of every web site and blog in town, as professional protestors ply their trade under a host of fictitious handles.

Watchdogs, you're here for the facts and here they are. The next time your loony tune in-law is at your house with a few beers in his gullet talking trash about the rich needing a soaking, feel free to rain on his parade with some quick facts, courtesy of the Minnesota Department of Revenue.

Income taxes comprise nearly 45% of the state's revenue. The sales tax comprises another roughly 30% with other 25% coming from various sources. Remember, property taxes are almost exclusively a local tax.

So, the income tax is the biggest revenue driver in the state budget.

The richest 20% of Minnesotans pay 72% of the income tax.

The richest 5% pay 43% of the income tax.

The richest 1% pay nearly 25% of the income tax.

How about the poor?

The poorest 20% pay NEGATIVE .6% of the income tax, meaning they actually don't pay anything into the system, but get money back through refundable credits. That's right, the poorest 20% don't pay income taxes at all.

In fact, the bottom 40% of wage earners pay just 1.7% of the income taxes. In other words, 60% of Minnesotans pay 98.2% of the income taxes.

And remember, most Minnesota businesses pay their taxes through the individual tax structure. It's hard to create jobs by punishing job creators. That's like being pro-egg and anti-chicken.

<http://m1e.net/c?67117810-15YiqYjPs0ygw%403902214-Zg3Butxx3..wg>

3. Storm the Beach!

With the budget crisis in full swing, Watchdogs are wondering what the intrepid crew down at the courthouse is doing to tighten the county belt, besides handing out pay raises and taking junkets.

Just this week, the county board got serious about the budget crisis and took the bold and courageous step of, well, uh, well, EXPANDING THE COUNTY WATER PARK! Yes, the county voted to issue over \$3 million in debt to finance a 910-foot "lazy river" and a tower with two more water slides.

Sweet. If rising property taxes price you out of your home, you can just throw on your Speedo and saunter on down to the lazy river to bathe and recreate at the same time (no shaving in the river, please).

And if child protection workers are laid off to balance the county budget? No problem. Abused children can find a few moments of escape at the good ol' water park.

Rising crime and no money to hire sheriff deputies? No sweat. Just treat the wave pool as your personal panic room, as you hide behind the five-foot swells and acres of aquatic fun.

Last one in's a rotten taxpaying egg!

<http://m1e.net/c?67117810-ojmSQtOxrVleU%403902215-aCHJQptVfDnuo>

<http://m1e.net/c?67117810-RlqydcrKFID9s%403902216-Msrc6ppnhmIRE>

4. Per Diem Watch.

Speaking of tightening the belt, we've been watching our legislators and tracking their per diem payments. These are daily payments legislators receive during the session and at various times during the interim, ostensibly to cover meals and other expenses.

In the Senate, per diem runs \$96 per day while in the House daily per diem stands at \$77 per day. That's a heck of a lot of money for food. The Dog is hard pressed to see how one can spend \$96 a day on food. Unless, of course, you're Dan Erhart on a junket.

<http://m1e.net/c?67117810-eNZNAaCwnlmoM%403902217-8RTyVgHXQtAFs>

So how much did your legislator collect in per diem in 2008?

First, find your legislator here:

<http://m1e.net/c?67117810-Vxty4rsAZ.al.%403902218-ATBj2wS22dfpM>

Second, access the per diem payment list here:

<http://m1e.net/c?67117810-XGoQdVOO74KxA%403902219-awSAiKSBtN2zk>

5. Quote of the Week.

"Keeping business taxes low encourages business growth. That's pretty well proven. The idea that it's taxing the rich is just wrong."

Federal Reserve economist Art Rolnik

1/16/09

<http://m1e.net/c?67117810-sM8/P6sTqgaHw%403902220-l2BkTkTx6FFTw>

E-mail Update 1/23/09

In This Issue:

1. Inertia.
2. Legislation Update.
3. Airport Accountability.
4. School Daze.
5. Notes.

1. Inertia.

The inertia of government is absolutely amazing. Since the legislature start on January 6th, the level of activity is just slightly above comatose. Most committee hearings have been cancelled while the committees that are meeting have little on the agenda besides new member introductions and overviews of the legislative process. In fact, the House met in session yesterday for the first time in a week.

Of course, the Watchdog believes that the government that governs best governs least. But it is indeed breathtaking to examine the disconnect between the political rhetoric and the reality. For all the talk of a state budget crisis and the need for government intervention, there has been little activity.

The real shame is that government will dally for another month or so, and then run around slapdash trying to cobble together a budget before the May 18 constitutional deadline for the legislature to be done.

If things aren't done by then, legislators are looking at yet another special session and perhaps a government shutdown come July. If a special session arises, you can bet legislators will still take their per diem payments even though they didn't get their work done on time.

Put another way, the legislature has less than 120 days to craft the next biennial budget for the state. Every day that passes decreases the chance that there will be any meaningful systemic reform to our out of control budget while chances are increased that government will simply pass another go-along-to-get-along budget.

The governor's proposed budget will be released next week. An updated budget forecast will be produced in early March. Committee deadlines for legislation will also begin to fall about that time. In other words, taxpayers looking for serious budget action should tune in about March for the 75-day dash to adjournment.

For now, the Dog predicts legislators will need sunscreen and mosquito repellent by the time this mess gets resolved. Let's just hope the leaves aren't falling when it happens.

2. Legislation Update.

While there has been little action in Saint Paul, the fecund minds of our fearless legislators have been churning out bills for consideration. Below is a sampling of some of things that are on the minds of our politicians:

HF 22: An angler can use two fishing lines; HF 41: Stores must offer in-store recycling or be fined; HF 54: Issuing debt to build a nature education center in Jackson, MN; HF 59: Establishing the Environmental Justice Act; HF 85: Allowing GPS systems on dashboards; HF 92: Issuing debt to prop up the Duluth Zoo; HF 91: Mandating a bikeway on the Lafayette Bridge when rebuilt; HF 110: Establishing the Irv Anderson Highway;

HF115: Mandating responsible dog ownership classes; HF 124: Issuing debt for a train to Chicago; HF 170: Forcing phone companies to establish a procedure for people to decline a phone book; establishing fines if they don't.

HF197: Issuing debt for the National Volleyball Center; SF 159: Establishing a "Mississippi River" license plate.

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<http://m1e.net/c?67117810-WLrutyrZaSg1g%403922493-1zVRdax6N0Vjk>

3. Airport Accountability.

Watchdog readers are well aware of the Blaine Airport expansion scheme Anoka County tried to sneak through recently. Since Watchdogs know the county commissioners well, an accountability group has been established to watch the County and keep the bureaucracy accountable.

The group will hold a meeting:

January 29

7 PM

Mounds View Community Center

5394 Edgewood Drive

Questions may be directed to rrholch@attg.net , trubador2@msn.com, kjackanich.com, Riceb72@comcast.net

NOTE: This organization is not affiliated with nor endorsed by the Anoka County Watchdog, although we like where they're going with this.

<http://m1e.net/c?67117810-pKpuckKFq2Nx/6%403922494-7kT6NvrF15qHg>

4. School Daze.

The incestuous nature of Anoka County politics was on full display this past week. Former state Representative Kathy Tingelstad (semi-Republican from Andover) found a new political gig after being appointed to fill a vacancy on the Anoka-Hennepin School Board. (We guess 12 years at the legislature just wasn't enough.)

Since the Dog doesn't know the qualifications of other applicants, we can't say she's wasn't the best choice. But the choice is nonetheless curious. Was it based on merit or some other consideration?

After all, Tingelstad never served on any education committees in the Minnesota House. Her area of expertise was environmental issues. Tingelstad simply wasn't known as an education expert during her tenure.

<http://m1e.net/c?67117810-jwJQDx3B9uWXY%403922495-g7Ed9e/ninkyA>

Moreover, her education and work experience aren't in the area of education either.

Perhaps the Board figured she could serve as another lobbyist down at the Capitol. That may be true, but one senior GOP legislator noted that she would have better luck lobbying DFLers because her credibility with the GOP was shot. The Watchdog made a similar observation when it was rumored that Tingelstad would be hired as a lobbyist for Anoka County.

Well, good luck with that.

<http://m1e.net/c?67117810-QKJUsgwrNHRkY%403922496-6zKpkX6IFPzVs>

5. Notes.

The Watchdog welcomes aboard the hundreds to new email subscribers who have joined the subscriber network since the first of the year. To get up to speed on current issues, the Dog encourages you to visit our email update archive and browse for a while. Many of these issues have a way of popping up again and again and the educational value of our update vault can't be beat.

<http://m1e.net/c?67117810-BQ56.LZmEPgKw%403922497-1KAcxAwUUWxKo>

Once again, our stock of stylish t-shirts has run dry, although the Dubuque manufacturing facility continues to work both shifts meeting the demand. Hang tight, Watchdogs. All who request a shirt from Harold Hamilton shall receive. In this economy, it may be the only thing on your back government doesn't take!

E-mail Update 1/30/09

In This Issue:

1. Budget Battle Royale.
2. Stimulate This!
3. Hortman Takes the Pulse of America.
4. Quote of the Month.

1. Budget Battle Royale.

It's on, Watchdogs! With Governor Pawlenty unveiling his proposed budget this week, a hand grenade was finally rolled under the tent of a heretofore sleepy legislature.

Philosophically, the Guv's budget offered a big dose of reality and pro-active policy making.

First, the budget offers no tax increases. Pawlenty, unlike many legislators, readily understands that tax increases kill jobs. Tax increases repel capital and cause job creators to expand and relocate in jurisdictions that are more business friendly. This is 2009, not 1969. In 1969, it was easier to get away with tax increases because capital had fewer places to go. In 2009, capital can move around the globe on the click of a mouse. Pawlenty is right to realize that Minnesota government has a spending problem and not a revenue problem.

Second, Pawlenty seeks to strategically position Minnesota to better compete in the global economy by cutting business taxes. Again, capital seeks jurisdictions that are tax-competitive. When Minnesota's tax structure is competitive with other jurisdictions, jobs are created and real wealth is increased, unlike government "stimulus" proposals that do nothing except take money out of the private economy and recycle it through the bureaucracy.

Overall, the proposed budget isn't nearly as radical as some legislators claim it to be. It makes a real reduction in spending (as opposed to merely reducing a projected increase) by 2.2%, the first state budget reduction since 1986, when the real reduction was 1.5%. In 1983, the real budget reduction was a whopping 17%, which we managed to survive just fine.

Given the massive increases in state spending since that last reduction in 1986, state government is well positioned to survive a small reduction.

Moreover, why is it that so many folks expect that government shouldn't have to cut back when the folks who fund government frequently do just that?

Ask any small business owner who has managed to keep his or her business alive for more than 5 or 10 years. Odds are that these business owners have cut their budgets by far more than 2.2% during bad economies.

Or ask any private sector employee who has been in their career for any lengthy period of time. Odds are, that person has experienced a pay cut, pay freeze, or layoff at one time or another.

Let's get real. If state government can't find a way to suck up a 2.2% cut, our democracy is worse off than we thought.

By the way, here is the DFL budget proposal:
THIS SPACE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK.

So far, the DFL has been content to criticize the Pawlenty budget for using accounting shifts and relying on some one-time monies. The Dog thus looks forward to seeing a DFL budget free from accounting shifts and one-time dollars, including one-time federal bail out monies.

<http://m1e.net/c?67117810-2UC16JlhO8dk6%403942277-ZY0.5u.zKCfyM>

<http://m1e.net/c?67117810-iJBtmwPFANb8g%403942278-.sPCDIw.nP/MM>

2. Stimulate This!

President Obama and henchpersons Pelosi and Reid got what they wanted this week when the House voted in favor of a gargantuan, nearly \$1 trillion Stimulus Package that Ate Cleveland. What they didn't get was a whiff of GOP support.

The Watchdog couldn't be more pleased that the House GOP refused to lend a fig leaf of bi-partisan cover to this massive sham of a bill. The fact that Democrats couldn't persuade a single GOP member to support it proves that the bill is just a collection of larded up government projects disguised as a job creation package. There are many RINOs in the House Caucus who normally love to spoon with the Democratic leadership in the name of "bi-partisanship." Pelosi and Reid couldn't find one GOP pillow buddy on this one. Oh yeah, a number of Democrats opposed it as well.

This bill stinks primarily on three fronts.

The first is accountability. Do you really have faith that the federal government is going to maintain proper oversight over hundreds of billions in expenditures? Remember all the plasma TVs, tattoos, and porn purchased with Hurricane Katrina FEMA funds?

How about the first \$350 billion of the \$700 billion Wall Street bailout? Even the federal government admits it can't account for all the expenditures. Meanwhile, Wall Street thumbs its nose at the taxpayers by continuing to dish out billions in bonuses to the same fat cats who drove their banks, and the entire economy, off a cliff. And here the Dog was thinking that bonuses are a reward to a job well done.

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<http://m1e.net/c?67117810-OvNI28yO4at2o%403942280-UMR7bjW1643go>

<http://m1e.net/c?67117810-7DELezePx54ec%403942281-.hgygjhtaJR76>

Second, this so-called stimulus bill is, as is always the case, filled with shameless pork that no economist would deem helpful to mending the economy.

Check out these wealth creators:

\$1 billion for Amtrak;

\$50 million for the National Endowment for the Arts; \$650 million for coupons to buy high definition TV converters; \$20 billion for food stamps;

\$81 billion for Medicaid;

\$335 million for STD prevention;

\$400 million for “global warming” research

\$4.1 billion for activist groups like ACORN.

Yeah, that’s a list sure to enhance the creation of private-sector wealth.

Finally, related to the point made above, these pork programs will do nothing to truly stimulate the economy and create wealth.

Really, the whole rationale underlying a stimulus bill is a failed idea of Keynesian economics called the “multiplier effect” whereby we’re supposed to believe that \$1 in government spending yields more than \$1 in benefits to the economy. We don’t need an economics lecture here, but suffice it to say, if the theory were true, then Congress should pass a \$10 trillion stimulus bill and we can all live in paradise.

Look, when government taxes or borrows a dollar for some program, it takes a dollar from the private economy that is then unavailable to the private economy for investment.

The way to get the economy going again is to simply look to the policies of John F. Kennedy and Ronald Reagan. Both men knew that immediate and permanent tax cuts applied to the “margin” are true engines of growth.

In the meantime, we are handcuffing our children and their children to another nearly \$1 trillion in debt. By this summer, most taxpayers will suffer an acute case of buyer’s remorse.

<http://m1e.net/c?67117810-2qJem1wOLJjK6%403942282-/2W2/pGqCDOww>

3. Hortman Takes the Pulse of America.

State rep. Melissa Hortman is a true political divining rod. The DFL would be smart to put this young firebrand in charge of strategic thinking.

Responding to massive constituent pressure and dire need in her area, this Brooklyn Park native stood on the shoulders of giants and took on THE pressing issue of the day

when she authored a bill to bring the Olympics to the North Metro. Who needs to work on education and health care when there are gold, silver, and bronze medals to get the visionary juices flowing?

Now, on the heels of an important Pew survey, Hortman has once again accurately taken the pulse of America by introducing yet another bill to tackle global warming. In the Pew survey, global warming ranked DEAD LAST when respondents were asked to rank political priorities for 2009.

The economy is in the tank? The state budget is billions in the red? Too bad, we've got polar bears and Eskimos to think about. Priorities, people! Priorities!

<http://m1e.net/c?67117810-tlldWCaaZtpfE%403942283-HMILNbQFbw2L2>

<http://m1e.net/c?67117810-mor2l8nwDZfh6%403942284-cyy8jVfPoClol>

4. Quote of the Week.

"This county is moving to the right and that's threatening the progressive things we're trying to do."

Good Ol' Boy Godfather Dan Erhart, finally coming clean after years of telling taxpayers he was a fiscal conservative.

<http://m1e.net/c?67117810-pA.kcNMtNuX/w%403942285-tDEkJGDtd.qj2>

E-mail Update 2/6/09

In This Issue:

1. Peace in the Middle East.
2. Change Suckers Can Believe In.
3. Creating Jobs, Government Style.
4. Anoka County Does Right.
5. Airport Update.

Legislative Update: Loyal readers, the Watchdog is keeping a sharp eye on proceedings at the Capitol but most of the activity is rhetoric at this point. Despite being in session (and collecting per diem) for about a month, our legislators are engaged in a game of wait-and-see at this point. Perhaps that's good news since growing government and raising taxes is what many legislators consider "productive."

1. Peace in the Middle East.

The news out of the Middle East has not been good of late. With warfare raging on the Gaza Strip, the world has recently seen stark reminders of the age-old, often violent conflict between Arabs and Jews.

What has been overlooked is a rare display of solidarity between Arabs and Jews. Indeed, it has been many years since an issue has so united these warring parties.

So what, or who, is to praise for bringing a ray of sunshine to often-gloomy Israel? Jimmy Carter? The United Nations? Yasser Arafat and Yitzhak Rabin reaching out from beyond the grave? Is it a common foe, perhaps disease, pestilence, or famine?

Try light rail. The Wall Street Journal reports that Arabs and Jews in Jerusalem have united to oppose the partially finished light rail system that would traverse the city.

Like every rail project, the Jerusalem project is late and is way over budget. The project began in 1993 and is expected to cost nearly \$1 BILLION – all for a line that will run 8.3 miles.

That Jerusalem would pursue light rail has raised the ire of just about every camp within the city.

Ultra-Orthodox rabbis have urged the mayor to "cancel this evil."

The PLO calls the line an "illegal Zionist project."

One Arab taxpayer summed up the mood by observing, "It's a waste of money, a waste of time, a waste of everything."

Thus, light rail is an early favorite for the 2009 Nobel Peace Prize. Hey, don't laugh. They gave the damn award to Al Gore in 2007!

Word is that currently under-employed and former state Representative Kathy Tingelstad will accept the award on behalf of light rail.
<http://m1e.net/c?67117810-kEfe/ZsdwIkHQ%403963233-Wrro0kttEIMUs>

2. Change Suckers Can Believe In.

Hey Obama cheerleaders, how's that change thing working out for ya? So far, Team Change is comprised of Washington insiders, former lobbyists, and folks who think paying taxes is a good idea – for everyone else.

Having said that, Democrats in Washington have done something right in speaking out against the excesses of the welfare kings on Wall Street who are dishing out bonuses and taking expensive retreats while enjoying the relative ease and comfort of the welfare safety net hammock.

Just this week, welfare king Wells Fargo cancelled a 12-day Bacchanal at the upscale Wynn hotel in Las Vegas after first defending the junket as part of their “corporate culture.”

Our salt-of-the-earth Democrat leaders in Congress are successfully shaming the Wall Streeters into a more moderate lifestyle, which is as it should be.

And how about the lifestyle of those who are casting stones? With Congress driving the national debt through the roof and garnering record low approval ratings, we know the last thing these humble public servants would do is junket on the taxpayer dime. Right? Right?

Wrong. Democrats in the House of Representatives have spent over \$500,000 of your money for luxury retreats over the past five years. So while these same leaders are clucking their tongues over Wall Street rip-offs, they themselves are lounging at the nation's most luxurious retreats on our dime as well, even during this tough economy.

So who's the bigger scam artist? The one who scams or the one who scams while also decrying other's scamming?

Change we can believe in!

<http://m1e.net/c?67117810-i0kgeeJk/88Nc%403963234-wzZfNN1mW3.0A>

3. Creating Jobs, Government Style.

Speaking of the job Congress is doing, the Stimulus that Ate Cleveland is getting porkier by the hour.

Supporters of “doing something” have tried to find refuge by hiding behind “shovel ready” public works projects that perhaps aren’t as likely to draw fire as, say, money for the National Endowment for the Arts.

The U.S. Conference of Mayors has issued a wish list of municipal projects they seek to have funded with federal dollars. The list does little except prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that mayors are every bit as inept as the Congress.

Check out some “highlights” of the wish list and the number of jobs created:
\$886,000 for a Frisbee golf course (4 jobs created)
\$4.5 million for an eco-park (50 jobs created) \$500,000 for a dog park (7 pooper scooper jobs created)
\$1.8 million for tennis courts (38 jobs)

Change we can believe in!

<http://m1e.net/c?67117810-l.Kbr5q/g6716%403963235-FgXAYCNLwfx.c>

4. Anoka County Does Right.

Being a non-partisan keeper of the good government flame, the Watchdog is never hesitant to give credit where credit is due. In fact, the Dog feels a little twitter in the old heart whenever circumstances offer a chance to praise Anoka County government.

Such is the case this week when we learned that Anoka County has been aggressively pursuing welfare cheats. Anyone who rips off the system ought to be found and prosecuted. In fact, it’s a sad commentary on our collective ethics in that some are criticizing the county for protecting taxpayers.

Congratulations to the county in leading this effort.

Perhaps the county can send some investigators to Wall Street to stamp out rampant corporate welfare fraud.

<http://m1e.net/c?67117810-oaoUVRFHPMX4.%403963236-HihV5zwVCEb2I>

5. Airport Update.

The watchdogs looking after the Blaine Airport expansion are doing a great job. They had over 200 people attend their first meeting last week, including a number of elected officials. The event also garnered intensive media coverage.

The Watchdog congratulates this group and also acknowledges that they indeed need to stay on the watch.

Key Air, one of the big players in pushing for an airport expansion, has hired a lobbying firm. You don’t do that unless you’ve got an agenda.

<http://m1e.net/c?67117810-xEBS3GIqfaog%403963237-9lf4eqwLj81U2>

Also, kudos to the elected officials who showed up to listen to the group:

Carol Mueller (Mounds View Council)

Tom Tillberry (MN House)

Paul Gardner (MN House)

Don Betzold (MN Senate)

Rhonda Sivarajah (County Commissioner)

Robyn West (County Commissioner)

Bob Nelson (Mayor Spring Lake Park)

If the Dog missed other elected officials in attendance, let us know. We understand members of the Lexington Council were also there.

What a surprise that the Good Ol' Boy contingent was AWOL. Commissioners Berg, LeDoux and the Godfather himself (Erhart) didn't make it. Perhaps if the meeting had been held in Las Vegas or Phoenix...

E-mail Update 2/13/09

In This Issue:

It's Friday the 13th AND the legislature is in session. Bad karma, very bad karma...

1. Legislative Update.
2. Economics 101 by Professor Buckley.
3. Sad but True.
4. Public Trough.
5. Private Trough.

1. Legislative Update.

The biggest news out of the Capitol this week was that the budget deficit for the upcoming biennium will likely grow from an estimate 4.8 billion to somewhere between \$6-7 billion. Sadly, the news isn't a big surprise given the continued deterioration of the global economy.

Over in the Senate, Senator John Marty is working hard to increase the size and scope of government by authoring SF 118, a bill to provide a single-payer government-run health care system in Minnesota. Rumor has it that the cost to the state would be \$16 billion per year, about 50% of the current budget for the entire state.

Just what we need. Government-run health care rationing.

<http://m1e.net/c?67117810-r0byt/57/m/Yk%403982813-X8CKNnEX9DLTM>

Over in the House, the Hortman Unit has been hard at work tracking the North Metro's favorite Lefty in disguise.

HF 267 would require child seats for just about every kid under 8. Another nanny state bill and a problem in search of a solution. The Olympics, California car emissions, and nanny state child seats. Take a look at what Rep. Hortman has authored this year. Any bills regarding job creation or budget reforms? Any bills to reform health care costs or reduce crime? Check it out.

<http://m1e.net/c?67117810-mhkhDpcp9Bw2M%403982814-r5lv21jZVwhV2>

2. Economics 101 by Professor Buckley.

Washington politicians have been working hard to pull a Jedi mind trick on American taxpayers by convincing them that the "stimulus" is really a wonderful thing.

<http://m1e.net/c?67117810-klpkTmmdSd8Nc%403982815-z6eGjSyt8w0E2>

Thankfully, we have 3M CEO George Buckley out there talking some common sense.

In a speech last week, Buckley emphasized that smaller government and tax cuts are the key to long-term job creation and prosperity.

While Buckley saw some short-term advantage to a reasonable stimulus bill, he labeled the pork in the current package “scandalous” and a “waste of public funds.”

Buckley also pointedly noted that Minnesota’s total corporate tax rate is 41.4%, among the highest in the world and a barrier to job creation in Minnesota.

By contrast, Ireland and Singapore have a corporate tax rate of zero. And for all you non-critical thinkers out there who want to soak corporate America, just remember that these taxes are ultimately paid by three sources and not by the company itself. First, consumers pay the tax in the form of higher prices. Second, investors pay the tax in the form of lower dividends (which also get taxed). Third, employees pay the tax in the form of lower wages and benefits.

Most importantly, Buckley uttered our quote of the month when he got back to basics: “There are only three ways in the world in which to create new wealth – manufacturing, agriculture, and minerals extraction.”

Hmm, we didn’t see government spending on the list.

<http://m1e.net/c?67117810-s6UD2wF0Nw89.%403982816-7ZT09tAPMbNFk>

3. Sad but True.

You just can’t make up this stuff. Last week, the Watchdog profiled the Blaine Airport runway group that is monitoring the possible extension of a runway. (Editor’s Note: Rep. Tim Sanders of Blaine was at the meeting, which we neglect to mention.)

The Dog observed that Good Ol’ Boys Scott LeDoux, Dennis Berg, and Dan Erhart were all truant that evening.

Kudos to the Coon Rapids Herald for following up on the story and obtaining alibis from all three delinquents. In the adult version of the “Dog Ate My Homework” game, all three provided their best bulls**t excuse for failing to face taxpayers. Drum roll please:

DENNIS BERG: Berg claimed he simply refused to show up because it wasn’t his district that was involved.

Wonderful attitude, Mr. CHAIRMAN. If you don’t care because it isn’t your district, do the Blaine folks a favor and abstain from voting on the issue in the future. By the way, the title is COUNTY commissioner, not DISTRICT commissioner.

DAN ERHART: Erhart claimed he was working hard down at the Capitol until late in the night. The Dog has little doubt the “meetings” were conducted at some restaurant using a county-issued credit card.

Moreover, if the Godfather is at the Capitol, then the county must need that army of lobbyists it employs. On the other hand, if you've got the lobbyists, then surely he could have stepped away for a couple of hours to meet with the people who fund his salary.

SCOTT LEDOUX: In what's sure to be a Watchdog classic rivaling the Hawaiian Jetlag Incident, LeDoux couldn't attend because he was in Florida enjoying a mid-winter junket at taxpayer expense. So, on the front page of that week's Herald, a front-page headline screams, "County is Looking at Up to \$7.1 million in Budget Cuts." Then buried on page 10A is the story about LeDoux sunning his backside on the taxpayer dime (guess there isn't a budget problem, eh?). By the way, Rhonda Sivarajah and Robyn West were only two Board members who bothered to show.

Sivarajah said of the poor Board attendance, "Frankly, if you live in Anoka County, whether you're impacted by the airport noise or not, you should be concerned because if our property values fall around the airport, the people over in Dan Erhart's district are going to be paying a bigger piece of the property tax pie."

God bless Rhonda Sivarajah.

<http://m1e.net/c?67117810-zT/1d7fPW3ChY%403982817-j9zyvV5UXf2Do>

<http://m1e.net/c?67117810-emVIK.B0esvTI%403982818-8bFamMmnvv1D6>

The Watchdog hereby announces a contest. Imagine you're one of the good Ol' Boys and send us your excuse as to why you didn't attend the meeting. Winner gets a Watchdog coffee mug!
Harold@anokacountywatchdog.com

4. Public Trough.

Forbes magazine this week ran a great article on our beleaguered public employees. This news is especially timely since GOP state Senators have offered legislation to freeze public employee pay in Minnesota – with the attendant wailing and gnashing of teeth from the public labor union bosses.

Feeling bad for government employees? Be healed and read this:

<http://m1e.net/c?67117810-SrgOWv41B9Tns%403982819-JyDY.5hMJtkhg>

5. Private Trough.

Ah, those tricky Viqueens. If thought they were clueless, inept, and laughable on the field, you should see these guys on the political football field.

This week, the Queens threw a public temper tantrum over not getting enough attention at the Capitol. Yeah, excuse those crazy legislators, they actually perceive the budget deficit as a bigger problem.

Could there be a worse time for the Vikings to come around with their hands out, looking for some corporate welfare? In one sense, you can't blame them. Just about every "free market" business leader has had his hand out asking, "Brother can you spare \$700 billion?"

On the other hand, this is just typical of the team's ham-handed efforts under the "leadership" of chief lobbyist Lester Bagley. It was quite humorous to read of Bagley ripping the governor for not getting a stadium solution in the six years he's been in office.

Um, Lester. Here's another chronological stat. You've been the team's lobbyist for the past six years (and more). What did you do while the Gophers and Twins managed to get a stadium?

Brad Childress and Lester Bagley have one thing in common. They have an equal number of wins when it comes to the big game.

As the Dog has always said, Lester Bagley is a stadium opponent's best friend.
<http://m1e.net/c?67117810-Ls2G762vCS.qY%403982820-6LBjQpknAG.Ls>

E-mail Update 2/20/09

In This Issue:

1. The Magical Misery Tour.
2. Keepin' it Real in 48B.
3. Another Lunch Opportunity.
4. Mortgage Madness.
5. The Winner.
6. Quote of the Week.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Concerned Citizens of the North Metro (the Blaine Airport group) announces it's next meeting:

February 24

7 PM

Spring Lake Park City Hall
1301 81st Ave.

1. The Magical Misery Tour.

The magical misery tour is coming to take you away Coming to tax you today The magical misery tour is dying to tax today Dying to tax you today, tax you in every way.

Despite being in session since early January, and despite knowing the economy is in the tank since at least last September, DFL leaders in Saint Paul still have no plan to balance the state's budget, which must be done by late May, or a special session must then be called, complete with per diem payments.

So far, the DFL plan consists of trashing the governor's budget and putting on a series of passion plays around the state "to get input" in the form of town hall meetings. The legislature is 90 days out from the end of session and is now starting to "get input?"

Well, Watchdogs, if it's input the politicians want, then give some input. The Magical Misery Tour 2009 is making a stop in Coon Rapids:

February 26, 2009

7 PM

Coon Rapids City Hall

If you want to speak at the meeting, you must sign up here:

<http://m1e.net/c?67117810-6ZiyToz8Cuwbo%404002441-wTWf.tE7FtejY>

See you there!

2. Keepin' it Real in 48B.

Watchdogs in House District 48B have been closely tracking state Rep. Jim Abeler's activities at the Capitol since session began in early January. What's interesting is that the vast majority of bills which he has co-authored belong to DFL chief authors.

Apparently, that veto override prom date has blossomed into a real love affair, including a special political romance with DFL gubernatorial hopeful Rep. Paul Thissen (DFL-Minneapolis).

Of course, the Dog always dishes credit where credit is due. So let's recognize three good bills Abeler has co-authored:

HF 363 (phase out of corporate income tax) HF 57 (Photo ID required to vote) HF 988 (MN prohibited from enacting REAL ID)

Come on Jim, resist the temptations of Darth Anderson Kelliher and embrace Obi-Wan Seifert. You can do it.

<http://m1e.net/c?67117810-lo46lurEIM0MY%404002442-0rU5tjJ6i8WXo>

3. Another Lunch Opportunity.

We call Dan Erhart the Godfather of the Good Ol' Boys for a reason. A master of self-promotion and the art of feasting at the public trough, Erhart has few peers (at least here in Minnesota. Louisiana? That's more like it).

The County announced last week that the Godfather had been appointed to a newly minted governmental entity that will – Yippie! – “better enable awareness of ongoing rail initiatives.”

Wonderful. With enough rail, the Dog is sure we can pull out of the recession.

Giving Dan Erhart a governmental appointment and a government credit card is like giving a bottle of whiskey and car keys to a teenage boy.

No doubt, there will be numerous opportunities to dine and junket at taxpayer expense while “better enabling” rail awareness (is there a ribbon?). Hey guys! Lunch is on Erhart!

<http://m1e.net/c?67117810-UN9//vA.r3e3A%404002443-yWrstP9Hytcd2>

By the way, the Watchdog is quite relieved that Anoka County has retained the all-important “Public Information Manager” position. We trust there will be no layoffs or freezing of public safety positions or child protection worker positions until this position is first eliminated. Geez, Dan, could maybe write your own self-serving press release? Yeah, they slashed millions from the budget, but you just have to keep the propaganda officer.

4. Mortgage Madness.

Are you feeling bailout fatigue, Watchdogs? After bailing out the welfare kings of Wall Street, after bailing out the fools in Detroit, now the bailout starts to hit home with a mortgage bailout.

That's right, folks. You get to foot the bill for your neighbor who bought a house he couldn't afford on the foolish premise that the real estate market would appreciate forever, turning real estate lead into gold. In politics, no good deed goes unpunished. This, folks, is a classic moral hazard, with the folks who played by the rules being forced to bailout the ones who didn't. What's next, bailing out those who lost at the craps table in Vegas? The folks who bought those futures contracts and lost out? The guys who bought Enzyte and discovered it doesn't, ahem, pump you up?

There's one other kicker in there as well, called a "cram down" provision. This provision, sought by "social justice" types for years, allows a bankruptcy judge to summarily write down the terms of a mortgage for a bankrupt party. This may seem well and good until you realize that it will raise interest rates for everyone else because the mortgage lenders will have to anticipate losses from cram downs and collect enough to cover the anticipated losses.

Better than that, your kids get to pay back all the debt to their Chinese peers, who will own us like a banana republic before it's all over. Did you know that the \$800 BILLION "stimulus" will ultimately cost 3.27 TRILLION once all the interest on the debt is factored in.

With all the people jumping into the wagon, will anyone be left to pull it?
<http://m1e.net/c?67117810-m.Cr5szjXRhEI%404002444-HjBmip6cpbliA>
<http://m1e.net/c?67117810-PPm1gCGzyTi7s%404002445-jZ/1Pc5YUw5rw>

5. The Winner.

Many thanks to the scores of loyal readers who participated in our "make a Good Ol' Boy excuse for missing the airport meeting. We received a number of excellent entries, but we're not into feelings and we'll name just one winner of the coveted Watchdog coffee mug.

"I do apologize for missing the Anoka airport runway meeting. But, you see I received a scorching sunburn while touring an ethanol plant in Jamaica. With no Aloe Vera to cool my burns I promptly took a Citation X to Alaska to cool off. Please accept my sincere apology and let the dear tax payers know that I am suffering with them during these times, my burns are a constant source of irritation."

The winner left no name as of yet. Maybe it was Dan Erhart himself!

6. Quote of the Week.

This one is a doozy. Not only does the quote come from the over-worked Hortman Unit, Meli\$\$a outdid herself by accomplishing something Watchdog CEO Harold Hamilton has been trying to do for many years. Namely, get some ink in The Wall Street Journal.

Ignoring the economy, Meli\$\$a is focused like a laser on the whole climate "change" hysteria and is pursuing, once again, legislation to make cars more expensive by reducing those rascally carbon emissions.

Said Hortman, "We live in a world that has been famously described as hot, flat and crowded, and, as state leaders, it is up to us to take actions to make it less hot than it could be."

The Dog knows of one way to reduce the hot air coming out of Brooklyn Park.
<http://m1e.net/c?67117810-37j66/NfSDSOs%404002446-S3FnVlpyHkY.M>

E-mail Update 2/27/09

In This Issue:

1. Misery Wrap Up
2. Invisible Train Costs Real Money.
3. Why Minnesota is Broke.
4. Why America is Broke.
5. A Solution.
6. Uh, Big Government Never Left.

Editor's Note: Stay tuned next week for a big announcement from the Watchdog regarding future plans! The Good Ol' Boys are sure to be peeved.

1. Misery Tour Wrap Up.

Neither snow, sleet, nor a howling wind could stop last night's North Metro installment of the Misery Tour.

Above all, it was an excellent exercise in democracy. Despite the weather, an overflow crowd packed the Coon Rapids council chambers, spilling into the hallway outside. That taxpayers are engaged is a very encouraging sign.

Recognition should also be given to the legislative staff who supported the event. The budget primer given by the non-partisan House Tax committee staff was first-rate. The staff also did a remarkable job accommodating the crowd by finding extra seating and adjusting the audio throughout the building.

Nearly every Anoka County legislator showed up: Sen. Betzold, Sen. Foley, Rep. Scott, Rep. Sanders, Rep. Laine, Rep. Dittrich, Rep. Abeler, and Rep. Meli\$\$a Hortman.

The crowd basically broke down into three categories, as you might expect.

First, there were the usual suspects demanding tax increases to "sustain our quality of life." They all claimed that Minnesota was "going backwards" and that tax increases (paid by someone else, of course) would act as some sort of time machine that would re-create the mythical "good ol' days."

Goodness. As if throwing tax money at any issue equals better results. If that were the case, Minneapolis public schools would have the highest test scores in America.

It was also interesting to note that many in Tax Increase Crowd were public employees who failed to disclose their vested interest in bigger government. Typical was one man who talked about the GREAT education his kids got in the Anoka-Hennepin Schools and the need to "invest" in that wonderful school district. He didn't mention that he was a teacher, and union official, in that very district.

The second group was comprised of Watchdogs who exhorted legislators not to raise taxes, especially during a recession, chief among them Watchdog founder, CEO, and Grand Cahuna of Capitalism Harold Hamilton. If anything, taxes should be cut. Hey, the Watchdog is only following the lead of famed Democrat John F. Kennedy, who implemented tax cuts to spur a flagging economy.

The third group was a cantankerous bunch who were rightly ticked off that the legislature has done nothing thus far. While a town hall meeting is nice, it should have been done back in November when it was crystal clear that there was going to be a budget crisis. To start "listening" in late February is too late. Of course, these legislators have been copping per diem payments since early January.

Here are some figures for all the folks concerned that Minnesota government is going backwards:

FY 96-97 General Fund Spending: \$18.6 Billion FY 06-07 General Fund Spending: \$31.5 Billion

An increase just a bit above inflation, eh?

<http://m1e.net/c?67117810-EzmPOTbHbv8Qc%404023051-jlEcWd8k5W3/c>

Here's another fast fact:

MN corporate tax rate: 9.8%

Nevada corporate tax rate: 0%

<http://m1e.net/c?67117810-bBs5u9D6ianmU%404023052-7AHAYXkZJ0p0g>

2. Invisible Train Costs Real Money.

Northstar rail is indeed the Invisible Train. Behind schedule and over budget, the poor folks who were scammed into believing the Train would be their transportation salvation are still waiting at the platform. Maybe late 2009.

The Invisible Train might be late, but it wants a fare increase. Just when you thought the Train couldn't shock you, along comes a proposed fare increase even though a single passenger has yet to ride and a single car is yet to be removed from the road.

Being a public policy web site of solutions, the Watchdog has simple and fair way to set fares. Fares should be set so that the fare box recovery (this is the cost of running the train that is paid by riders) is equal to the fare box recovery for the popular and successful Northstar commuter bus service.

The fare box recovery for the bus is approximately 90%.

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<http://m1e.net/c?67117810-eRg0RzZyVPHKs%404023054-EDqYtBOJcpiLI>

<http://m1e.net/c?67117810-EL23fK0nlYZ5o%404023055-5jspRcrSRxOzo>

<http://m1e.net/c?67117810-IM5FWGZb6pzYI%404023056-4EYFWIkj4otlw>

3. Why Minnesota is Broke.

Simply put, Minnesota is broke because of runaway spending and not because taxes are too low.

A prime example of broken, runaway government is Minnesota's own "Bike trail to Nowhere." The Star Tribune reported this week that a one-mile section of the Cedar Lake trail in Minneapolis will cost an estimate \$9.2 million to build.

Despite the severe economic downturn, Minneapolis officials intend to plow ahead with this one-mile bike trail extension that will cost almost exactly what it will cost to expand Highway 10 to three lanes each way between Egret Blvd. and Hanson Blvd.

What's even more galling to beleaguered taxpayers is that Minneapolis apparently has "bicycle coordinator" position. The article quotes one Donald Pflaum, who is listed as the city's Bicycle Coordinator.

How ironic that Mayor RT Rybak just released a budget that cuts police services in a city dubbed "Murderapolis" while keeping bicycle employees. Minneapolis taxpayers ought to demand that not a single cop be cut until the tricycle office is shut down.

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<http://m1e.net/c?67117810-OioXrek.dJ9yo%404023058-CNikhqNwRIQ1k>
<http://m1e.net/c?67117810-OazYMlojAnJ6Y%404023059-Ahs4zMQB5gHFE>

4. Why America is Broke.

America is broke because we have a big spending president who, among other things, thinks it good public policy to bail out failed business models.

Remember that \$25 billion bailout of Detroit? The bailout could now cost somewhere in the neighborhood of \$130 billion. Isn't it amazing how government programs never shrink in size? Oh, wait. If the Community Organizer in Chief has his way, tax cut programs will shrink and disappear, further driving capital and jobs into the waiting arms to tax-friendly jurisdictions.

Detroit has a failed business model that is in serious need of reform. Bailouts do nothing except waste money and delay the inevitable, and much needed, shake out of the auto industry.

This is economics 101, folks. When a business fails, it is because the market is sending a signal that the resources being consumed by that business could be more efficiently deployed elsewhere, either by a competitor in the same industry or even in a completely different sector of the economy. All resources are limited and it's a good thing when resources move from inefficient uses to efficient ones. It is how wealth is created and prosperity multiplies.

Propping up Detroit makes as much sense as propping up VHS makers against competition from Blu Ray makers. It makes as much sense as propping up newspapers to protect them against Internet news sources. It makes as much sense as propping up buggy whip makers against competition from, well, auto makers.

Let's keep in mind just how broken Detroit's business model really is. Remember the "jobs bank" that paid workers not to work? Remember the "health care for life" goodies? An article this week exposed yet another giveaway. In the auto industry, workers can retire with 30 years of service. If you started at GM right out of high school, you could retire with full benefits at age 48! Even teachers don't have that kind of benefit.

It's bad enough that Detroit's management wasted the voluntary investments of those who purchased the debt and equity instruments of auto companies. It's an absolute crime that taxpayers (and future generations) have become unwilling investors in failed companies who are victims of their own managerial incompetence.

And what about the 130,000 Americans who work for auto companies that don't need a bailout? Does it make sense to have the federal government working against them by subsidizing the competition? How aggravating it must be for these workers to pay taxes that will be used in an attempt to put them out of work.

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<http://m1e.net/c?67117810-weSCctGWcXNnE%404023061-vM7KSO0SytEv%2e>

5. A Solution.

Yes, there are indeed government programs that work. One of those programs is Anoka County's diversion program for meth addicts. As Watchdogs know, drug addiction is a health problem and not a criminal justice problem. Programs that assist junkies in getting clean are far more cost effective than a narrow-minded "lock em' up" philosophy, at least with respect to non-violent offenders.

The Pioneer Press wrote this week that the County's meth diversion program was in danger of falling to the budget axe. The program cost \$287,000 per year.

Being a public policy web site of solutions, the Anoka County Watchdog will do the work of the county commissioners free of charge.

In 2007, Anoka County spent \$228,000 on lobbying services. If they eliminated lobbying as well as the Public Information Manager position, the meth program would not only be spared, it could be expanded.

<http://m1e.net/c?67117810-INBxv/yDqXgzE%404023062-2XDGizm8HQvuE>

If Dan Erhart cut back on a few lunches, the program could cover Hennepin County as well!

<http://m1e.net/c?67117810-XRBEKdtFhoQ0M%404023063-UGWiVm.O0a0II>

6. Uh, Big Government Never Left.

Consistent with his campaign promises, the Community Organizer in Chief has proposed a massive increase in federal spending, and a massive increase in federal power along with it.

Not surprisingly, Republicans in Washington are ripping the spending proposals and decrying the spending increase.

Forgive the Dog if we're just a tad skeptical. Is this political kabuki theater or a true change of heart and a rediscovery of bedrock principles?

It's nice to hear Washington Republicans express concern regarding big government, but where was the outrage regarding the Medicare Part "D" expansion? Where was the outrage with respect to a transportation bill with over 5,000 earmarks?

Excuse us, but we're not going to cut Republicans any slack until we see concrete actions, like the strong vote against the "stimulus" bill.

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E-mail Update 3/6/09

In This Issue:

1. Attention to Deficit Disorder.
2. Small Pain.
3. Forecast Calls for Slush.
4. The Hortman Unit Reports.
5. Airport Meeting Recap.
6. Quote of the Week.

Editor's Note: Stay tuned, Watchdogs! A major announcement from Harold Hamilton will be published soon!

An addition to last week's update. Misery Tour attendees included state Representative Jerry Newton of Coon Rapids. We failed to note his attendance in our last update. Sorry, Jerry.

<http://m1e.net/c?67117810-qpgFdRy8779Cg%404043175-jQIX2oMiUp86M>

1. Attention to Deficit Disorder.

The much-feared state budget forecast arrived this week with somewhat of a thud. With some reports claiming the deficit could rise to \$6 or \$7 billion, the deficit is now projected to be a lower-than-expected \$4.57 billion.

The deficit is still of gargantuan size and thus presents the legislature and the governor with an opportunity to make gargantuan reforms in the way state and local government operates.

Moreover, the new deficit number was tempered by a \$1.3 billion injection of Monopoly money hot off the printing presses in Washington. Without the Monopoly money, the deficit is closer to \$6 billion. This is one-time money that will not be available in the "out years." What this means is that the state's budget, when resolved will likely lack "structural balance", meaning that there will be projected budget deficits for future state budgets beyond the upcoming two-year budget cycle that begins July 1st.

Legislative Republicans were resolute in their pledge to resolve the deficit without adding to the already high tax burdens faced by Minnesota families and businesses. Minority Leader Marty Seifert wryly noted that the DFL has a case of "Attention to Deficit Disorder."

Governor Pawlenty was equally resolute.

It is the DFL that seems to be paralyzed by the crisis.

The DFL has simply failed to offer any concrete solutions or provide any leadership on what is undoubtedly one of the defining legislative issues of our time. That's not an

understatement when you consider that this is the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression.

The DFL majority has known since at least November of last year that the state's budget was deep in the red. Yet the majority did nothing for the rest of 2008.

The 2009 session convened January 6th and legislators started collecting their per diem payments. The DFL leadership did nothing in January beyond taking the expected pot shots at the governor's budget proposal. Maybe the DFL would be well served to recall Harry Truman's observation that any jackass can kick down a barn. It takes leadership to build one.

February dawned and the DFL decided to go around the state on a Misery Tour to gather input from the citizens. That would have been grand idea – back in November.

Here we are in March and the DFL majority has yet to offer their budget. In fact, the Speaker of the House was quoted as saying their budget would be ready by mid-April, leaving just over 30 days to finish a budget before the legislature adjourns on May 18. Of course, there may be a special session beyond that, with the possibility of a government shutdown starting July 1st.

Thus far, the legislature has passed a grand total of 5 bills. Now the Watchdog is quite comfortable with governmental inaction, but the point is that legislators shouldn't be sitting around the Capitol collecting paychecks for nothing. Maybe the legislature should have convened in late March or early April. Just what in the heck are these guys doing?

The DFL paralysis is quite understandable. Raising taxes is in their DNA but they don't want to be out on a limb calling for tax increases, especially during a recession.

The GOP is united against job killing tax increases. Even the Obama administration is holding off on their War on Success tax increases until at least 2011. Doctor Tom Stinson, the state's economist noted in a private meeting with legislators that tax increases during this time of severe economic turmoil would be unproductive. Thus, it appears that no one is willing to take on tax increases with the possible exception of our brave band of DFL revenue enhancers in Saint Paul.

So what's a massive majority to do? Sit on their collective a\$\$es.

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<http://m1e.net/c?67117810-xrD35nnQwsZIM%404043178-9/L/YuwfkhE3k>

2. Small Pain.

Here's another clue regarding why Minnesota government is broke. This week, the Coon Rapids Herald ran a headline article blaring the news that the City of Coon Rapids had laid off a grand total of six, yes six, employees.

City Manager Matt Fulton noted that in his 28-year career, he had never, ever, laid off an employee. Said Fulton, This was the worst day of my 28-year management career."

Let's keep some perspective, Mr. Fulton. While numbers can fluctuate, laying off six employees probably comprises somewhere around 1% of the city workforce. Most private-sector employers can only dream of being forced to layoff that small of a number.

What's really telling is the fact that Mr. Fulton has never had to lay off an employee in a rather lengthy career. Managers with 28-years of experience in the private sector have had to lay off employees many times during their careers.

While no employer enjoys laying off employees, layoffs are a fact of life and actually necessary in a healthy economy.

Remember that all resources are limited. While the economic pie can grow, it still has limits. Thus, a healthy economy is a dynamic economy that is always changing and evolving as resources forever shift from unproductive enterprises to more productive enterprises. Unfortunately, workers are sometimes caught in between for a period of time.

A static economy that emphasizes job protection over innovation and wealth creation ultimately loses in the long run. Winston Churchill summed it up when he observed, "The inherent vice of capitalism is the unequal sharing of blessings. The inherent virtue of socialism is the equal sharing of miseries."

<http://m1e.net/c?67117810-EBnREh8Y6c6FE%404043179-j78klosjg6/SM>

3. Forecast Calls for Slush.

Only in government would this happen. With mayors and city councils howling over a reduction in aid payments from the state, we find out that many are sitting on a mountain of taxpayer cash.

MPR reported this week that the State Auditor has uncovered approximately \$1.5 BILLION in reserve monies being hoarded by city governments in Minnesota.

While the Watchdog has no problem with cities accumulating reasonable "rainy day" funds, the scope of hoarded funds and the attitude of city officials is both typical and appalling.

Typical is the attitude of Wadena Mayor Wayne Wolden. Wolden hysterically noted that state aid cuts will mean his backwater burgh will only plow the streets "once every other blizzard." What Wayne didn't note was that his city of approximately 4,000 is sitting on a \$1 million budget reserve.

Similarly, Murderapolis Mayor RT Rybak is sitting on \$133 million in reserves. This after he unveiled a budget that takes cops off the streets.

It's obvious that these mayors have taken a cue from the local schools boards and are adopting a "Washington Monument" strategy, whereby units of government make the most painful cuts first to fool the public into believing that the cuts are too painful and too deep and thus the only way out is another tax increase.

The economic sky is pouring rain. Time to build that ark, mayors.
<http://m1e.net/c?67117810-xDrhtmsApeapg%404043180-d56up.UXmu486>

4. The Hortman Unit Reports.

Uh, oh. It looks like the Hortman Unit has caught Meli\$\$a telling a whopper, a very expensive whopper.

Rep. Hortman is quite proud of the fact that she was an enthusiastic leader of last year's \$6.6 billion tax increase, enacted over the governor's veto, for transportation. In fact, Hortman's web site still boasts a massive piece entitled "Truth" in which she self-righteously proclaims:

The truth is I fought for and achieved transportation funding that speeds up completion of Highways 610, 10 and 252.

Okay, that's straightforward. Hortman claims the \$6.6 billion tax increase speeds up completion of HWY 610.

Now let's check Hortman in the local Brooklyn Park Newspaper.

On February 18th, Hortman was quoted:

"if there's no economic stimulus, there's no 610."

Now she says that without the federal stimulus plan, HWY 610 can't be completed.

So which is it, Meli\$\$a? Which statement is the whopper? Maybe both?
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<http://m1e.net/c?67117810-inm3tyU0WI/JQ%404043182-PxTnshDMEbcr2>

5. Airport Meeting Recap.

The Blaine airport runway group met again recently. Apparently, a number of elected officials were shamed into showing up and doing their duty to listen to the folks who pay their salaries and benefits.

By all accounts, two of the officials felt quite put upon. Blaine Mayor Tom Ryan took to the podium and chastised the group for “wasting his time.” Good Ol’ Boy policy wonk Scott LeDoux privately told another citizen, “I’m just here to listen to all the lies.” Maybe LeDoux thought Dan Erhart was going to speak.

Talk about a couple of selfless, dedicated public servants! Anyway, we’re sure there’s a mid-winter junket somewhere for LeDoux to unwind after listening to all the lies. And take Tom Ryan with you.

6. Quote of the Week.

“Yes.”

Governor Tim Pawlenty responding to whether he would oppose DFL tax increase proposals.

<http://m1e.net/c?67117810-zC.d0ef/1RVqU%404043183-QeDAn63ZbLiIA>

E-mail Update 3/13/09

In This Issue:

1. The Minnesota Watchdog Arrives!
2. 2009 Tax Incidence Study.
3. Did You Know?
4. Quote of the Week.

1. The Minnesota Watchdog Arrives!

Watchdog Founder and CEO Harold Hamilton announces the launching of The Minnesota Watchdog! The Minnesota Watchdog promises to take governmental accountability to new heights as we bring the same public policy analysis, humor, and journalistic excellence that citizens have come to expect from the original Anoka County Watchdog web site and bring to a state-wide audience.

The Minnesota Watchdog fills a void in the current Minnesota public policy dialogue by offering daily news briefs and a weekly email update featuring news, analysis, and information from a classical liberal perspective honoring the bedrock democratic principles of limited government and free enterprise.

We further fill the void by shining our uncompromising accountability spotlight on governmental officials across the state, all the way from Tim Pawlenty to the Yellow Medicine County Commissioners.

Visit www.theminnesotawatchdog.com to sign up for our daily news briefs and our weekly email updates. Being purveyors of consumer choice, you can sign up for either the news brief or the weekly update. But the patriot's choice is to sign up for both!

Listen for our state-wide ad campaign during Joe Soucheray's "Garage Logic!"
<http://m1e.net/c?67117810-bJVM/0GuCj1cY%404063863-eNaiOuovzqYpk>

Always on the Watch! The STATE-WIDE watch!
www.theminnesotawatchdog.com

2. 2009 Tax Incidence Study.

The Minnesota Legislature has released the 2009 Tax Incidence Study this week. For Watchdogs who don't remember, the study is a non-partisan overview of Minnesota's tax burden and how that burden is distributed.

The study is non-partisan and offers excellent information regarding Minnesota's tax system. Of course, the Watchdog needs to weigh in on the subject since the mainstream media likes to cherry pick certain stats and conclusions to support their annual whine-fest that the "rich" don't pay enough taxes.

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The latest report notes that Minnesota's tax burden has become more regressive, meaning that poor people pay a greater percentage of their income to taxes than the wealthy. The study notes that in 2006 (the baseline study year), the bottom 10% in Minnesota paid 23.8% of their income in state and local taxes while the richest 10% paid 10% of their income to state and local taxes.

The Left then uses this statistic to call for punishing success in the form of higher taxes for the wealthy.

But here's what the Left doesn't say. First, the study notes, "the effective tax rate for the first decile (the poorest 10%) is overstated for many reasons."

Space does not permit the listing of the many reasons, but suffice it to say, the poorest 10% don't pay 23.8% of their income in state and local taxes.

But here's the real important part: They never tell you about how the wealthy pay the lion's share of taxes.

Take the income tax, which is the biggest tax revenue generator in the state. The bottom 10% don't pay income taxes in Minnesota. In fact, they take money out of the system in the form of refundable tax credits. The next 10% don't pay income tax either. So, the bottom 20% of income tax payers don't even pay into the system.

And what of the top 10%? They pay 57% of all state income taxes. The top 5% pay 44% of the income taxes. And the wealthiest 1% pay 25% of the total income taxes collected.

So who isn't paying their fair share?

Maybe tax burdens ought to be allocated on the basis of governmental services consumed. The wealthiest 10% certainly don't suck up 57% of governmental services.

The simple fact is that the wealthy in Minnesota more than pay their fair share.

Moreover, this concept of "progressive" taxation is suspect and downright antithetical to the very principles upon which this country was founded.

Punishing success and rewarding sloth isn't what made America the greatest economic force the world has ever seen. Discriminating against successful people by forcing them to pay a grossly disproportionate share of the tax burden is an egregious violation of concept of equality enshrined in our Constitution.

The practical reality is that higher and higher tax rates only drive wealth, capital and prosperity to lower-tax jurisdictions.

Of course, the DFL speaks of making the system more “progressive” by raising taxes on the wealthy.

First, the DFL should acknowledge its hypocritical role in making the system more regressive, which they have done by passing a raft of sales tax increases for light rail, baseball stadiums, zoos, bike trails, the arts, MPR and the like. The sales tax is very regressive and it only stands to reason that when you raise these taxes, the system becomes more regressive. DFLers are interested in protecting the poor from regressive taxes only when it means pounding the wealthy, which does nothing to help the poor except reduce the jobs and charitable services upon which they rely.

Property taxes are also regressive and the DFL has consistently opposed capping property taxes, which was the law in Minnesota for many years – known as “levy limits.” In fact, Minnesota last session brought back limited levy limits and the DFL is right now working on legislation to remove that cap and let school districts and other local units of government raise property taxes without limit.

And SURPRISE! A DFLer is the author!

<http://m1e.net/c?67117810-TVT0a.lyo1uil%404063865-2aoRbAo.E11X%2e>

The bottom line is that the successful in Minnesota are already bearing more than their fair share while 20% of Minnesota households don’t pay income taxes at all.

And don’t forget about the corporate taxes here in Minnesota. Minnesota is one of a shrinking number of states that have a corporate tax at all.

Most states have realized that corporations don’t pay corporate taxes. Instead, corporate taxes are paid by employees in the form of lower wages and benefits. They’re paid by consumers in the form of higher prices. Finally, they’re paid by investors who realize lower rates of return and smaller dividends.

Most troubling, the study predicts that Minnesota’s already sky-high and uncompetitive commercial and industrial property tax rate will increase 42% between 2006 and 2011.

There is an increasing incentive for job providers to leave Minnesota. More business friendly states like North Dakota and Iowa are faring much better. And please spare the Dog the bombastic arrogance of denigrating the quality of life in those states compared to Minnesota. Yes, the Dog loves frigid Minnesota, but it’s not like those two neighbors are third world banana republics. Heck, you may be moving there with your job soon enough!

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<http://m1e.net/c?67117810-XWex9e8C28x5M%404063868-yPD3KJ07039Is>

3. Did You Know?

George W. Bush added \$2.9 trillion to the national debt in 8 years.

Barak Obama will add 3.2 trillion to the national debt in fewer than 2 years.

Is this the “change” some of you sought?

4. Quote of the Week.

I'll keep my money, my guns, and my freedom. You can keep the “change.”

- Unknown

E-mail Update 3/20/09

In This Issue:

1. Three Card Monty.
2. The Good Ol' Persons Network.
3. Budget Cuts are for Someone Else.
4. Watchdog Sends Intel.
5. Upcoming Meetings.

1. Three Card Monty.

It's that time of year down at the Capitol when legislators and the governor finally get around to thinking in a serious way about our serious budget deficit. Now that the Senate DFL, the Governor, and the House DFL (at least through the words of the Taxes Chair) have weighed in, taxpayers can pick a budget card from this game of fiscal three card monty. Let's take a closer look at what each proposal offers:

The Governor's Revised Proposal:

What's Good:

- No Tax increases. Minnesota is already uncompetitive with respect to taxes. Increasing taxes only drives away job creators and other successful people who create wealth.
- Cuts to Health and Human Services. This program area is out of control and threatens to bankrupt the state. Thanks to Pawlenty taking federal "stimulus" money, the state must agree not to cut HHS rolls until the next biennium (the out years). Pawlenty's revised budget proposes to cut \$173 million from HHS in the out years, although that may be too little too late.

What's Bad:

- The DFL is right when they say Pawlenty relies on one-time money, including one-time federal "stimulus" money and about \$2 billion worth of accounting shifts and other gimmicks. Since this money ends while the programs often continue, Pawlenty is pushing a deficit off to future years, meaning the budget lack "structural balance." Moreover, it creates a credibility gap when the governor criticizes federal money and then takes it. If Republicans are to regain credibility with the voters, they need to stop with the smoke and mirrors and rely on credible accounting methods.
- Too much spending. Pawlenty's revised budget proposes a meager overall spending cut of less than 2%. In the out biennium, spending increases again. Only in government would the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression lead to such meager, anemic results. The only recession-proof industry is government.
- Increased education funding. The Pawlenty budget actually increases K-12 education funding by about \$183 million. This is little more than bowing to the education lobby.

While the new money is earmarked for teacher merit pay, there is a good case to be made that education ought to take a cut, especially since it comprises nearly half the state's general fund. Republicans ought to focus on results and not money. What a cop-out.

The Senate DFL Plan:

What's good:

- The Senate plan includes a 7% across the board budget cut, including sacred cows like education.
- Structural balance. The DFL plan balances and doesn't rely on accounting shifts and other gimmicks.
- The DFL plan also calls for \$78 million in public safety cuts. Good. Minnesota will get by just fine without so many Minneapolis firefighters hanging out at the fire station playing Xbox or cops sitting in medians writing traffic tickets to taxpayers who are running late to work to pay the taxes that pay for the generous benefits these government employees receive.

The bad:

- The plan calls for \$2 billion in new taxes, mainly coming from "the rich." If that means the top income tax bracket in Minnesota, the rate would have to rise to 12% to confiscate an additional \$2 billion, which is unlikely even for that band of success haters. So where else to get it? DFL Senator Tom Bakk has already broached an across the board income tax hike as well as taxing Internet downloads. Other DFLers speak of extending the sales tax to services and clothing.

The House DFL Plan:

- The House DFL has yet to release a comprehensive plan, although Taxes Chair Ann Lesczewski (DFL-Bloomington) has released some details via her committee. The good news of the proposal is that a proposal to tax Minnesota corporations only on sales in Minnesota and not on payroll or property assets in Minnesota would be accelerated. This "single sales factor" change would be good for Minnesota's business climate.
- The bad news is that the proposal would limit mortgage interest deductions, which would be devastating for many homeowners.
<http://www.mmb.state.mn.us/fin/budget>
<http://www.startribune.com/politics/41156942.html?page=2&c=y>
http://minnesota.publicradio.org/display/web/2009/03/18/budget_update/

2. The Good Ol' Persons Network.

Watchdog readers are no doubt familiar with the Good Ol' Boys network that uses the resources of government to their personal advantage. But just this week, one brave soul shattered that glass ceiling and earned her stripes by joining the boys at the public trough. "Good Ol' Person's Network" now joins the nomenclature of American culture,

right beside "personhole" covers, "womyn", and "personing" a table at the local bake sale.

And wouldn't you know our very own Kathy Tingelstad was the "person" who blazed the trail into this netherworld of short workdays and defined-benefit pensions?

A citizen Watchdog source overheard a member of the Anoka County community health committee mention at a meeting that Tingelstad had been hired in the County's Public Health office as a "program and budget" director.

The Watchdog confirmed the hire and could little but admire the County's commitment to egalitarian graft.

Remember that the Watchdog reported late last year that there was an attempt to hire her as the County's third employee lobbyist. That attempt was turned back. No room for a lobbyist? No problem. Just find another desk.

Never mind that Tingelstad has no education or experience in this field. Why hire someone with the proper credentials when you can pay back the "person" who danced to the County's tune on commuter rail and transportation taxes? After all, in this economy, it would probably be next to impossible to find someone who actually has the proper education and experience for the job.

It looks like the smoke-filled back room needs a sit-down pisser. You go girl!

3. Budget Cuts are for Someone Else.

Speaking of the Good Ol' Person's Network, another County source reports that Godfather Dan Erhart has been traveling apace since the first of the year. The source reports Erhart will have been to Washington, DC three times by the time May 1st rolls around.

And you were stupid enough to think that maybe, just maybe, all the budget cuts at the County would cause the Godfather to think about the ethical implications of junketeering while the economic house burns to the ground. HA! Budget cuts are for child protection workers and suckers who have private sector jobs.

After all, how else would the Godfather do the important work of the people? It's not like members of Congress have telephones, email, or even offices located in Minnesota. The only obvious way to get to them is to get on an airplane with government credit card in hand.

Way to go Godfather. Even the economy can't crimp your taxpayer-funded lifestyle! I'll have the lobster!

4. Watchdog Sends Intel.

Watchdogs often send us intelligence on governmental waste. Below is one email we recently received from a Watchdog regarding the new County Medical Examiner office: I would like to bring to the attention of the taxpayers a couple of things but fear that I would lose my job. So I happened across the Watchdog website and decided to write.

The Anoka County Medical examiner's office is a newly constructed building in the town of Ramsey. The new building went over budget and the millwork in the office cost a fortune. Costs could have been cut without all of the expensive woodwork, wood paneling, expensive office furniture; and still the building would have been a great facility.

The building houses what is called a Lodox scanner which is a 3-D x-ray scanner, similar to a CT scanner. This is the only scanner of this type in a forensic office (in fact very few clinics and hospitals have a machine of this caliber for LIVE patients) and cost several hundreds of thousands of dollars. This is an incredibly high tech machine - when only a simple x-ray machine is used in forensic offices all across the US (such as offices in New York City, Los Angeles, Dallas...) Did the taxpayers really need to pay for a piece of equipment that no other forensic office has in the county?

One final note that the taxpayers need to know about is that the pathologists all have Anoka County credit cards (despite having salaries higher than the governor). The expenses on these cards should be made public so that there is some type of oversight. Also part of the county budget pays for the pathologists to attend conferences around the country (hotel, meals, travel and conference fees). Some of these trips are for Continuing medical education credits that a doctor needs to maintain his/her medical license. However, most doctors pay for that out of their own salaries (which I am sure the pathologists can afford).

The amount of wasteful spending in the office is terrible.

5. Upcoming Meetings.

The Hortman Unit reports that state Rep. Hortman will be holding two town hall meetings:

March 21st

10:00 AM

Anoka County Library

11440 Crooked Lake Blvd.

Coon Rapids

April 4th

10:00 AM

Brooklyn Park City Council Chambers

The Blaine Airport meeting group will hold their next meeting:

March 26
6:30 PM
Northtown Branch of Anoka County Library System
711 County Road 10 NE
Blaine

E-mail Update 3/27/09

In This Issue:

1. Where's the Disclosure?
2. Legislative Update.
3. Governmental Priorities.
4. Train in Vain.
5. Pawlenty Visits North Metro.
6. Join the Tea Party.

1. Where's the Disclosure?

There used to be a tradition and custom that when a person wrote a letter to the editor, either the letter writer or the newspaper would disclose major affiliations the writer had which demonstrated an obvious bias for or against the subject of the letter. This disclosure informed readers and maintained at least a veneer of objectivity for the newspaper.

Recently, ABC newspapers ran not one but THREE politically themed LTEs written by people with strong partisan affiliations which were not disclosed.

First, Paul Redhead of Andover wrote a letter critical of state Rep. Peggy Scott's (R-Andover) taking of legislative per diem. Neither Redhead nor the newspaper revealed that Redhead is an officer in the DFL Party.

<http://www.dflsd49.org/officers.htm>

Next, Bernadette Chlebeck of Coon Rapids wrote to extol the talents and experience of state Rep. Jerry Newton (DFL-Coon Rapids). Surprise, surprise, Chlebeck is a partisan Democrat who was a DFL-endorsed candidate for House District 49B in 2002.

<http://electionresults.sos.state.mn.us/20021105/ElecRslts.asp?M=LG&LD=A&R=ALLREPS>

Finally, Ted Butler of Andover wrote a letter critical of state Senator Debbie Johnson (R-Ham Lake). Ted Butler was the DFL-endorsed candidate for House District 49A just last November.

<http://www.dflsd49.org/candidat.htm>

These writers do the community a disservice when they conceal their partisan affiliations and write letters that portray them as merely concerned citizens. Instead, their "concerns" are little more than rank partisanship.

Likewise, shame on ABC newspapers for their failure to make these disclosures as well. If the Anoka County Watchdog can sniff out this fraud, then surely an established newspaper ought to be capable of doing the same.

Unlike the mainstream media in Anoka County, you can count on the Watchdog to give readers the real story. That's why newspapers continue to shrink in readership while the Watchdog grows.

http://abcnewspapers.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=6608&Itemid=43

http://abcnewspapers.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=6519&Itemid=43

2. Legislative Update.

Today is the first deadline for bills being considered by the legislature. These deadlines are designed to winnow down the number of bills that legislators must consider. There are approximately 7 weeks left in the 2009 session.

Today's deadline requires that a bill must pass all relevant policy-related committees in at least the House or Senate.

Thus far, a grand total of six bills have been signed into law, making the Watchdog wonder just what taxpayers are paying all that per diem for. While legislative inaction is wonderful for society at large, taxpayers shouldn't be forced to pay legislators to lean on their political shovels.

This bill should be number 7:

https://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/revisor/pages/search_status/status_detail.php?b=House&f=HF1738&ssn=0&y=2009

This one should number 8:

https://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/revisor/pages/search_status/status_detail.php?b=Senate&f=SF0790&ssn=0&y=2009

3. Governmental Priorities.

The Star Tribune reports that the city elders in Coon Rapids are wringing their hands over the dilemma posed by building a community center while the economy sputters. These politicians are probably a little concerned about looking like hypocrites as they bemoan budget cuts while trying to find a way to fund non-governmental activities like yoga, wallyball, and aerobics for old folks.

The community center could come in at a whopping \$60 million for the full monty or a more "modest" \$24 million scaled-back version. By comparison, the city's total budgeted expenditures for 2009 are \$38 million.

Being a public policy organization dedicated to solutions, here's one for Coon Rapids, free of charge. Regardless of the economy, get off the community center kick and focus on crime, streets, and other core functions. If folks want to swim, walk, or bask in

origami, they already have options. It's called the private sector, in the form of Lifetime Swim and Fitness. The YMCA is also there to meet these recreational needs.

That Coon Rapids would consider a mega-project that would compete with the private sector is a prime example of what's wrong with the country.
<http://www.startribune.com/local/north/41609712.html>

4. Train in Vain.

The Coon Rapids Herald was all ginned up this week to note that the last piece of Chinese-financed monopoly money has arrived at the Anoka County Courthouse to pay for the Northstar train. It has to be a bittersweet moment for Good Ol' Boys. Northstar has provided so many junketeering opportunities. The commuter rail conference in LA, the transportation conferences in DC, the trip out to Idaho to "inspect" the locomotives that arrived in Anoka a month later. Good times, brother!

Unfortunately, the taxpayers inherit the legacy of a train that was proposed as an 80-mile line that would cost \$160 million and wound up being 40-miles long with a price tag of \$320 million. Only in government would that math be praised.

Oh well, the Good Ol' Boys now have the "Northern Lights Express" project to feed their voracious junketeering appetites. Never mind that even Amtrak had to dump the rail line because it was so inefficient. Leave it to Anoka County to pick up where Amtrak left off.

http://abcnewspapers.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=6527&Itemid=28

5. Pawlenty Visits North Metro.

Governor Tim Pawlenty visited the Metro North Chamber of Commerce for a breakfast speech yesterday morning. The Governor found a receptive audience for his common sense message that government, like any business, has to live within a budget.

Watchdogs in attendance noted that the only sour faces were those of Good Ol' Boys Dennis "I'm Republican when it suits me" Berg and the Godfather himself, Dan Erhart. Those two looked like the kid who's told that he has to eat his vegetables before cake will be served.

C'mon guys, at least you got a free breakfast out of the taxpayers! Yes, Mounds View isn't Phoenix, but free is free!

Watchdogs also noted that Commissioner Rhonda Sivarajah applauded the governor's call for fiscal restraint.

6. Join the Tea Party.

On April 15th, you can join the Minnesota Tea Party to register your disgust with governmental spending. Watchdogs, this is your chance to do your part to move America back in the right direction. If our brave forefathers were willing to risk everything to dump tea into Boston Harbor and found this great nation, you can get off your behind for an evening and show up to protect our future.

When: April 15

Time: 5-8 PM

Place: The Capitol in Saint Paul

<http://teapartymn.com/>

E-mail Update 4/3/09

In This Issue:

1. Minnesota Watchdog News;
2. Correction;
3. Pawlenty's Pizza;
4. Roll Call;
5. Artsy Fartsy.

1. Minnesota Watchdog News.

Friends, if you haven't done so, you need to check out the Minnesota Watchdog web site. While similar to the Anoka County Watchdog, the Minnesota Dog is different in many respects.

For example, the Minnesota Watchdog publishes a morning news email that posts headlines from international, national, and state sources - from a Watchdog perspective. This unique morning update gives Watchdogs the news they want at the click of a mouse. This morning email also features news commentary, polls, "inside" political information, and a daily dose of sports news. No one on the Internet is offering this type of e-news update. Of course, a subscription is free, courtesy of Watchdog Founder Harold Hamilton.

Like the Anoka County Watchdog, the Minnesota site also offers a Friday email update. The Minnesota Friday update is different, however, in that Harold Hamilton usually chooses one topic and provides thorough, in-depth analysis.

In other words, all three email updates compliment each other. Do yourself a favor and sign up for both Minnesota Watchdog email services today!
www.theminnesotawatchdog.com

Here is an excerpt from today's Friday commentary:

The Curious Case of the Furloughed State Employee

While economists debate whether we have reached the bottom of the longest economic recession since the Great Depression, the American economy continues to shed jobs apace. One respected employment tracking service estimates that 742,000 jobs turned to dust in March. Later today, the Department of Labor will give the official estimate, which in any case won't be pretty.

To avoid layoffs, "furloughs" have become a popular alternative to preserve jobs. A "furlough" is a fancy word for putting employees on unpaid leave for a period of time. The Utilitarian idea is that through the shared sacrifice of pay cuts, jobs can be preserved.

A scan of the Internet will quickly reveal that furloughs are popular and in full-force across every sector of the economy around the world. At Ford's Saint Paul assembly plant, employees just last month came off a six-week furlough. In Japan, Asahi Glass is emblematic of companies utilizing furloughs. Furloughs are also becoming commonplace in the public sector. In fact, government at every level is looking at furloughs.

Thus, it should have come as no surprise when it was revealed that Governor Tim Pawlenty's labor negotiators proposed furloughs of 24 days per year for state workers during contract recent contract negotiations. Because Minnesota has a public sector labor law tilting the field in favor of unions, furloughs are a "term and condition" of employment that must be negotiated with the government unions.

Predictably, there was a hue and cry from our public servants, as exemplified by the hysterical response from the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), who labeled the proposal a "bomb."

Immediately, the blogosphere came alive with tales of overworked, underpaid AFSCME employees who thought it outrageous that they would be asked to share in the same hardships as the private-sector workers who pay the taxes that keep state workers employed.

So what's the truth regarding AFSCME employees? What kind of pay and benefits do they get? Should they indeed be exempt from furloughs?...

http://visitor.constantcontact.com/manage/optin/ea?v=001rSkw_bAFFonGVs6is-gP1A%3D%3D

2. Correction.

You know the Dog prides itself on offering factual information. And you know that in that rare case that we get things wrong, we'll correct the record.

Such is the case regarding the chamber of commerce breakfast event featuring Governor Tim Pawlenty last week.

First, our friends at the Twin Cities North Chamber wrote to remind us that they co-sponsored the event with the Metro North Chamber. Sorry, guys. Here's a free plug: <http://www.twincitiesnorth.org/>

Now the second correction sounds like a whopper, but we'll let you, the loyal reader, decide the veracity of this claim.

An employee of Anoka County sent the Dog the following email:

Mr. Hamilton: Please know that the commissioners who attended the governor's breakfast paid for their attendance out of their own pockets; not the taxpayers.

Dan Erhart paying for his own breakfast? Forgive the Watchdog for being just a wee bit skeptical of such a claim. Did the guy who racked up a \$520 bill at Manny's on the taxpayer dime really pay his own way? Did the guy who blew \$450 at Morton's on the taxpayer dime really pick up his own tab?

Is this economy so bad that it has shamed Dan Erhart into paying his own way? If so, things are worse than we thought!

3. Pawlenty's Pizza.

Governor Pawlenty joined many other Republican governors in criticizing the federal "stimulus" bill. Pawlenty correctly noted that the billions in spending was filled with pork, lacked sufficient oversight, and was financed with debt that will be paid by future generations.

Having staked out the moral high ground, Pawlenty had an opportunity to make a principled stand by refusing the stimulus money. He could have raised his political profile by demonstrating principled leadership regarding one of the most critical issues of our time.

Instead, he acted like a typical politician and quickly stuck his hand in the stimulus cookie jar, rendering him just another politico who talks one way and acts another.

Even worse was Pawlenty's smarmy, platitudinous response to charges that he is acting the hypocrite. In an interview, he noted that "when you're paying for the pizza, it's okay to have a slice?"

Really? Even when the pizza is festooned with enough pork to choke and elephant and a donkey?

How about the fact that he isn't paying for the pizza at all? Our leaders have done nothing more than whip out the government credit card and stuck a \$787 billion dollar sausage and pork pie on the tab. While our leaders gorge themselves on the pie, our kids and grandkids will pay for it when Papa China's comes calling for the bill.

Can you maybe guess what the Democrats will say the next time Pawlenty stands atop his soapbox to decry wasteful government spending? Have a slice, guv!

http://minnesota.publicradio.org/display/web/2009/03/17/budget_revisions/?refid=0

<http://www.startribune.com/local/42280092.html>

4. Roll Call.

The Watchdog was always designed to be a gathering place for like-minded citizens to share thoughts and ideas. The Watchdog always seeks to inspire people to take a stand by forming their own watchdog group.

Here are two local watchdogs worth checking out:
www.centervillemn.blogspot.com
www.northbranchpolitics.com

If there are others out there, respond to the roll call!

5. Artsy Fartsy.

Thank God! We can all stop worrying about the economy, Iran, Afghanistan, North Korea, and cancer.

Two artists yesterday hosted an open house to unveil their public art projects that will be featured at the new taxpayer-financed baseball stadium.

The artist's worked with a \$350,000 budget from the public till. Anoka County Watchdogs will be pleased to know that one of the "funding partners" was Northstar commuter rail. Yes, you paid property taxes to help two artists blow \$350,000 on public art work. But hey, the county is "cutting to the bone."

Project number 1 we're told is a bunch of steel hanging from the ceiling that looks like a 5-pointed star while also "suggesting" a baseball in flight. Wow...

Project number 2 is three stone murals depicting "baseball players and everyday people." Translated, that means "multi-millionaire baseball players and the average workaday suckers who suffered a tax increase to pay for the stadium." How nice...

E-mail Update 4/10/09

In This Issue:

1. HRA Plans Wider Tax Increase.
2. Legislative Update.
3. MN Budget Solutions has a solution.
4. Tick, tick, tick!

1. HRA Plans Wider Tax Increase.

Heads up, Watchdogs! The Anoka County Housing and Redevelopment Authority (HRA) is planning to levy property taxes across the entire county in 2010. Moreover, this tale has a number of twists and Good Ol' Boy turns that the mainstream media failed to cover. Which, of course, is why the Dog exists.

Editor's Note: This piece was compiled based upon a news story as well as discussions with sources inside county government.

Background.

The County HRA is a governmental body that administers and coordinates housing and economic redevelopment programs across the county. Created in 1994, the HRA spends tax money from sources including state and federal grants as well as a property tax levy within the county.

The HRA is governed by a board of trustees composed of county commissioners and appointed citizens:

Paul McCarron (good ol' boy)

Scott LeDoux (good ol' boy)

Dennis Berg (good ol' boy)

Rhonda Sivarajah

Bill Nelson (good ol' boy)

Donald Findell (status unknown)

Margaret Langfeld (The Susan B. Anthony of good ol' girls)

Here's where you need to pay special attention. Since 1994, the HRA has had a policy to only levy the HRA property tax in those cities that wanted to be a part of the county HRA. Cities that don't participate are those with their own HRA programs that choose to be independent, although some cities have their own program and still belong to the county HRA. The county here has, for once, pursued good public policy by respecting the choice of each city and township to decide their own HRA fate and participate in the county program by voluntary choice.

Currently, Bethel, Centerville, Columbia Heights, Columbus, East Bethel, Ham Lake, Hilltop, Lexington, Linwood, Nowthen, Oak Grove, Ramsey, Spring Lake Park, and Saint Francis participate in the county program.

The current policy was thrown into turmoil last week by a legal opinion authored by the county's outside bond counsel.

According to the opinion letter, the county not only has the authority, but a legal obligation, to levy the HRA property tax across the entire county, including those cities with their own HRAs. (Editor's Note: the bond counsel opinion is not a legally binding document. Instead, it represents the professional opinion of the author. Only a court of law can render a legally binding judgment). Of course, the HRA could choose not to levy at all, but this is Anoka County we're talking about!

If this opinion is adopted by the HRA as policy, it means that some cities with their own HRA must yield to the county levy or expose their taxpayers to both a city and a county HRA property tax levy.

The opinion also means that the HRA's actions since 1994 may have been illegal, bringing into question the validity of HRA actions, including bond issuance, since 1994.

Moreover, the entire way the opinion was brought to the HRA board raises questions.

At the meeting, Commissioner Sivarajah asked if the bond counsel opinion wasn't designed to intimidate East Bethel, which has been considering leaving the county HRA program.

Tim Yantos, county bureaucrat extraordinaire, replied that it wasn't the case because the bond opinion came first. But what the newspaper didn't report was that the bond opinion was authored in January of 2008! Why in the world was such a momentous and important legal opinion not shared with the board for well over a year? The media ought to be asking to who knew what when. For example, concealing this opinion means that the HRA may have illegally levied on property in 2009 by not having a countywide levy when agents of the county HRA presumably had notice from their attorney that a countywide levy was the only legal levy.

Finally, why did the opinion letter come to light recently? What other machinations could be afoot? Perhaps the increased monies from a countywide levy could be used to redevelop land in the county for, say, perhaps, maybe a football stadium?

2. Legislative Update.

The legislature has temporarily closed shop in observance of Easter and Passover. When the legislature re-convenes next Tuesday, legislators will have just over a month to pass and reconcile all omnibus appropriations bills and adopt a balanced budget for the upcoming budget biennium that begins July 1. So far, the legislature has done little of note, although both bodies have now passed a bonding bill that will provide illusory wealth creation while jacking up the state's debt load with bond-leveraged debt.

On Tuesday, the state Senate passed its omnibus education funding bill that slashed education funding by \$453 million. The Watchdog has no beef with making the education-industrial complex share the pain but it is indeed ironic to see the DFL-led Senate turn its back on perhaps the most powerful liberal special interest group in Saint Paul. Education Minnesota has spent untold millions keeping the DFL in charge in the upper chamber. Frankly, it's funny to see Education Minnesota get crapped on after spending vast amounts of union dues kissing the behinds of the same senators who passed this bill. That's what blind allegiance gets you.

Editor's Note: The Minnesota Watchdog has an excellent piece which further examines the politics behind the DFL senate vote. You can sign up, free of charge, to receive the Friday "public policy commentary" by visiting www.theminnesotawatchdog.com.

Will the legislature finish on time or go into a special session?

3. MN Budget Solutions has a solution.

As the legislature goes home to an un-deserved vacation and reflects upon three months of vapid legislative activity, one group is out there with a real-life, tangible solution to Minnesota's budget deficit.

The Minnesota Budget Solutions Coalition has released a sixteen-page report with realistic, honest budget solutions that resolve the debt without growing government or raising taxes.

The report is devoid of the accounting gimmicks and unrealistic growth assumptions that plague governmental budgeting techniques.

And these guys didn't even need per diem to make it happen!

4. Tick, tick, tick!

While politicians dwell on the mirage of debt-financed government "jobs" programs, you can see what those programs cost in real dollars right here.

Makes you just a little nauseous, doesn't it?

Generations ago, we wondered why Johnny can't read. Today, we wonder why Johnny owes so much to the Chinese.

E-mail Update 4/17/09

In This Issue:

1. Harold Hamilton's Tea Party Day Remarks.
2. Analysis of Minnesota Congressional Earmarks.
3. Anoka County and the Washington Monument.

Harold Hamilton's Tea Party Day Remarks.

Welcome to our tea party to fight against unfair taxation. With my new web site, The Minnesota Watchdog.com, I'm working hard to do something about this rip off.

Our family manufacturing business just sent in a big check with over 450 pages to the IRS and the state of Minnesota.

Presently, the tax code runs over 65 thousand pages. I don't understand it, my CPA doesn't understand it and most people in the IRS don't understand it. This year Americans spent over 5 billion hours preparing their taxes and over \$30 billion on tax services.

Many Americans spent 50¢ or more of every dollar on taxes. Our company spent 49¢ of every dollar of gross income on local, state and federal taxes and fees. And, President Obama has warned us - expect a lot more taxes next year. How much is enough?

In September, I sent a letter to Senator Klobuchar with an analysis of the 49¢ of every dollar of gross income that my company paid during the last fiscal year. To her credit, despite her busy schedule, she sent me a letter in response. She claims that the tax system is unbalanced. I agree. However, her letter claims that companies like mine don't pay enough and the increased taxes will be dedicated to paying off the national debt. Does she even know the size of the national debt? Has she talked to President Obama lately? The debt is skyrocketing. Senator Klobuchar also claims that my company is using loopholes to avoid taxes. What loopholes? In October I sent her a letter asking, "How much taxes do you believe that my company should pay?" What loopholes is my company taking advantage of? Maybe she'll tell me to send it all in. Maybe she despises profits. My banker told me that my company had to make a profit or find a different line of business. It takes profits to create jobs. I haven't heard from Senator Klobuchar. Senator, if you're listening, how much should my company pay? Should I just send it all in? Tell me what loopholes my company is using to avoid taxes.

Under President Obama, our national debt will more than double in the next ten years from \$5.8 trillion to \$12.5 trillion. So, how do we cope with this plus the other \$57 trillion in unfunded liabilities? The federal government has a plan. Print money. Even the Chinese are worried. They don't want to be stiffed. They loaned us money big time and they don't want to be repaid with dollars worth half as much. Inflation is the worst tax of all. At this rate of spending we may as well cut our dollar bills in half. In a few years that's all they will be worth.

Half of our production is for the international market. How can our company compete with taxes so high? High taxes is one of the reasons we are losing so many manufacturing jobs. Where are the jobs going to come from? How can we keep the workers we need on the payroll when we pay so much in taxes?

I grew up in Nebraska during the depression. Our family was poor. I can assure you that poor people don't create jobs. So, the government seems to be trying to make all of us poor. Where will the jobs come from?

In the early 80's, Dr Laffer, an economics professor, drew a famous curve on a cocktail napkin in a bar in Washington D.C. It's called the Laffer curve. It shows that at a tax rate of 100%, nobody is willing to work. Is it any surprise that we aren't willing to work for nothing? So, high taxes provide no incentive to work. I for one would head for a beach in Florida.

Our family business donates to food shelves and the Salvation Army. These days, the need is very great. But, President Obama thinks he needs the money. President Obama believes I'm giving too much to charity. So, why not reduce my giving so the President Obama can contribute to his favorite charity Acorn? Afterall they worked hard to elect him. Some of the Acorn people have been convicted of voter fraud. President Obama is convinced that with redistribution the government can take not only my hard earned charity dollars and even more give to the poor and to Acorn. In short, the government knows best. Does this belief that poor people deserve to live high on the hog sound like socialism? All of us believe in equal opportunity. But, do any of you believe I have the right to sit on my duff and let you get up early and work hard to feed me? I think not.

A famous quote from Karl Marx in the communist manifesto comes to mind. "From each according to his ability. To each according to his need." That's socialism.

So, in summary we still have manufacturing in Minnesota but it's struggling. High taxes cause manufacturing jobs to go out of state or to Asia. In Singapore instead of 49¢ of every dollar it is 17¢ of every dollar that goes to the government. In Ireland, it's 12 cents of every dollar. Low taxes is what creates jobs. And, log on to my web site, theminnesotawatchdog.com, to get the best daily newspaper articles. That's theminnesotawatchdog.com web site.

Analysis of Minnesota Congressional Earmarks.

Citizens Against Government Waste (CAGW) has released their annual "pig book" exposing the most egregious pork-barrel earmarks in the 12 major congressional appropriations bills for fiscal year 2009.

As Watchdogs would expect, the report isn't pretty. Despite the worst economy since the Great Depression, Congress just couldn't push away from the public trough and act responsibly, thereby confirming the fact that Washington is incapable of reform. The only true check on government spending is to reduce it - in a big way. It is indeed

galling to contemplate the massive generational theft that is financing this disgusting free-for-all.

CAGW identified a total of 10,160 pork-barrel earmarks worth a total of \$19.6 billion.

What's worse, despite all the high-minded rhetoric regarding transparency, 221 anonymous earmarks worth \$7.8 billion, which is over 1/3rd of the total cost of the earmarks.

As nauseating as it may be, consider some of the lowlights found in the pig book:

- \$1.8 million for swine odor research;
- \$1.9 million for a water taxi service;
- \$2.2 million for the Center for Grape Genetics;
- \$2 million to promote astronomy in Hawaii;
- \$4 million for the Center for Autonomous Solar Power;
- \$24 million to FEMA for "predisaster" programs;
- \$500,000 for the Native Hawaiian arts and culture program
- \$1.5 million for the California Trail interpretive center

You get the picture...and the bill!

And what of Minnesota's congressional delegation? Were the Northstar state's among the offenders? Let's take a look:

Senator Amy Klobuchar:

Senator Klobuchar requested 88 earmarks totaling \$163,563,625.

Among the lowlights:

- \$4.5 million to study how to use wood (you know, that brand thing that comes from trees)
- \$300,000 for wild rice research
- \$290,000 to study cereal disease
- \$20 million for the trolley between Minneapolis and Saint Paul
- \$381,000 for the Duluth Children's Museum
- \$500,000 for National History Day activities

Give her a break. After all, she's porking for two these days!

Editor's Note: Senator Norm Coleman was not included in the database.

Rep. Tim Walz (DFL - District 1)

20 earmarks requested for \$68,864,500

Lowlights:

\$712,500 for a transit operations center in that megalopolis Rochester

\$2.2 million for the Minnesota Satellite Multi-Modal Collaborative Crisis and Training Network

\$500,000 for the federal government to buy more land in Minnesota and Iowa

\$235,000 for the Uniform Farm Management Program

Rep. John Kline (GOP - District 2)

Rep. Kline requested no earmarks.

Rep. Erik Paulsen (GOP - District 3)

Rep. Paulsen requested no earmarks

Rep. Betty McCollum (DFL - District 4)

18 earmarks for \$54,685,000

Lowlights:

\$475,000 for a pedestrian median on Snelling Avenue (what happened to sidewalks?)

\$8.6 million for arts programs

\$6.8 million for the Kennedy Center (could we at least get pork for Minnesota?)

\$500,000 for a jobs program for ex-cons

Rep. Keith Ellison (DFL - District 5)

2 earmarks for \$25,303,000

One of the earmarks was \$24.8 million for a reading education program.

Rep. Michele Bachmann (GOP - District 6)

Rep. Bachmann requested no earmarks.

Rep. Collin Peterson (DFL - District 7)

19 earmarks for \$22,733,500

Lowlights:

\$475,000 for a gym on the Red Lake Reservation

\$713,625 for the Minnesota Center for Renewable Energy for unknown reasons

\$2.8 million for dirt management research

Rep. Jim Oberstar (DFL - District 8)

30 earmarks for \$34,215,143

Lowlights:

\$475,000 to study a train to Duluth (remember when Amtrak abandoned the idea?)

\$950,000 for a pedestrian bridge in metropolitan Isanti

\$2.8 million for Greater Minnesota Transit (where busses are really needed)

\$951,500 for a clean air project

\$95,000 for the Minnesota Humanities Center (we have one of those?)

In sum, it's not surprising that the politician considered most vulnerable by the Democrats would be the biggest porker in the House delegation. Shame on you, Mr. Walz. Even Democrat Tim Penny, a predecessor of yours, would have shown far more restraint.

On a very positive note, all three Republicans in the House chose not to participate in the foolishness. They will no doubt be criticized by some for not taking a slice of greasy bacon. Having said that, generations of future taxpayers will thank you for not handcuffing them to the Mount Everest of debt. It is a principled stand that the Watchdog concedes has more political downside than upside. That's true leadership, compared to the cowardice of Representative Walz, who is counting on his constituents to rejoice in spending money they don't have and sticking their kids with the bill.

We would also be remiss by not giving some kudos to Rep. Keith Ellison who showed restraint in requesting only two earmarks. That's more than the Dog can say for many Republicans. We haven't forgotten that the earmark orgy happened on the Republican watch as well.

Oink on, you crazy diamond!

Anoka County and the Washington Monument.

The county fathers in Anoka County have responded to the economic crisis in part by shuttering the county licensing centers one day a week.

Now there's nothing wrong with cutting back on government, but there is a problem with the way they did it.

The county decided to close the centers on Saturdays, the one day of the week when many working people can conveniently take care of licensing business.

By inflicting the maximum amount of inconvenience on the taxpayers, the county has adopted the age-old "Washington Monument" strategy. This strategy is named for a tactic adopted by the National Park service in response to budget cut backs years ago. The Service closed the incredibly popular site to create the perception that its budget had "cut to the bone" and was worthy of better public funding.

While you can no longer walk into a licensing center on a Saturday, the commissioners are still traveling on your dime. That's Anoka County government priorities.

E-mail Update 4/24/09

In This Issue:

1. Runaway Runway.
2. We Need Two Rallies - at Least.
3. The Taxman is Coming for You!

1. Runaway Runway.

Blaine airport watchdog group Concerned Citizens of the North Metro (CCNM) has done a wonderful job tracking Anoka County and Key Air's machinations to lengthen a runway at the airport and thereby jeopardize the safety and home values of those who live near the runway.

Contrary to the assertions of some local opinion leaders, it looks as if the issue is very much alive, with Key Air even retaining lobbyists to push the issue at the Capitol.

How interesting that the lobbying firm retained by Key Air also happens to lobby for the Anoka County Regional Rail Authority and the Northstar Corridor Development Authority. Can you say "Good Ol' Boys?"

The Watchdog strongly encourages readers to visit CCNM's informative web site. Even if you don't live in Blaine, those jets may one day be buzzing YOUR house.

Kudos to CCNM for their outstanding work. They are true "watchdogs" in every sense of the word!

Watchdog founder Harold Hamilton has also weighed in on the issue in an email to Metro North Chamber of Commerce executive director Tom Snell. Harold already smells trouble and suspects the Chamber will come out in favor of the longer runway without engaging the membership first in any meaningful way.

Harold's email to Snell follows:

Dear Tom,

Our company is opposed to lengthening a runway at Anoka County Airport from 5000 ft. to 6000 ft. for several reasons.

First, as a manufacturing company, there would not be a substantial amount of our shipments going out of that airport. Presently, all of our overseas system shipments are on a very large aircraft, such as a 747. Our large systems, which weigh 500 to over 2000 lbs., are shipped to other cities such as Chicago by freight forwarders using air ride vans. The systems are then loaded on a 747 and sent to their final destination. None of the systems are shipped out of Minneapolis by air. All freight forwarders use a city different than Minneapolis. (Typically Chicago.) The Anoka County Airport expansion will not accommodate these. All of our national system shipments are by

padding van. Most of our shipments of smaller items are by Federal Express or UPS. It's highly doubtful that these companies will ever use the Anoka County Airport. As a result, there is no meaningful benefit to our company.

At the MetroNorth Chamber meeting on March 4 it was acknowledged that a major reason for the expansion is to aid Key Air. Key Air is lobbying the state legislature for this expansion. Should a major reason for the expansion be to aid Key Air? Several years ago, the financial backers of Key Air were warned by myself at a chamber board meeting that the investment in a fancy flight based operation (FBO) was not going to be profitable. I knew this because our company has an aircraft based at Anoka County Airport and it was obvious that there has not been an immense amount of business. The restaurant that opened up several years ago by this FBO had to be closed for lack of business.

Should we lengthen the runway for the small amount of additional business it might provide? Any additional business can easily be accommodated by the St. Paul, Minneapolis or other airports such as Chicago. An expansion at Anoka costs real money and will increase our taxes.

Another argument is that it should be supported by the business community and that considerations of the effects on the community residents should not be a consideration of the business community. This is a very short-sited view. We in business should consider the overall effects on our community. That is one of the reasons that I started the Anoka County Watchdog web site. The MetroNorth Chamber only considered the business community and did not consider the additional sales taxes that would be paid by residents for the Viking stadium.

Probably one of the major reasons to appose the 6000 ft. runway is because of the opposition of the residents that live in proximity of the airport. Their property values will go down. As a result, there will be huge opposition. Several years ago, the north/south runway was modified because of excess noise by propeller driven aircraft. A substantial amount of noise from jet-propelled aircraft will be an even bigger problem.

Then there is the problem of increasing fuel costs and that effect on the use of jet aircraft. What will be the cost of jet fuel in ten or twenty years? It could easily increase by ten times or more. Already there is a resurgence of propjets because of fuel prices! Propjets are much more efficient and do not require as long a runway as jets. As per the Times On Line April 21, 2008 issue entitled Turboprops fly back in favor as greener and cheaper options, a quote in the article is, "Private jets are now passé and that turboprops are the chic way to travel."

So, investment in something more worthy than this project is advisable. At the very least, the chamber should remain neutral on this very controversial issue!!

Sincerely,
Harold Hamilton

2. We Need Two Rallies - at Least.

The state of America is such that one rally just won't suffice. While the April 15th Tea Party bash across the Fruited Plain was spectacular, we need to sustain the momentum.

To that end, our small government brothers and sisters are hosting another tribute to freedom that promises to at least rival the enthusiasm and energy created by the Tea Party.

The 2009 Tax Cut Rally will feature Governor Pawlenty (who will no doubt avoid talking about health impact fees, commuter rail, or baseball stadiums) and "Mr. Right" Jason Lewis.

Wear your Watchdog t-shirt! If Harold Hamilton spies you at the rally, you may just win a special prize.

3. The Taxman is Coming for You!

With big majorities in both houses of the Minnesota legislature, the DFL has come up with a unique, novel approach - NOT! - to solving the government's budget deficit: tax increases.

And this time the DFL has gone waaayyy beyond the old class warfare and sin tax pages in the playbook. They've gone far beyond the "rich" paying their "fair share" and all the "impact fees" to mitigate the horrible costs smokers and drinkers visit on civilized America. (Never mind that wealthy folks already pay the freight and smokers die before they become a warehousing burden on society.)

The House lowlights:

- Disallows the itemized deductions for real and personal property taxes, mortgage interest, and charitable contributions.
- Imposes a new 9 percent income tax rate at \$300,000 of taxable income for married joint filers, adjusted for other filing statuses.
- Repeals individual income tax credits for dependent care expenses, K-12 education expenses, long-term care insurance premiums, and health insurance premiums of certain section 125 plan participants.
- Imposes a gift tax to complement or back up the Minnesota estate tax
- Allows counties to impose a local sales tax.
- Repeals levy limits for large cities.
- Eliminates the "truth in taxation" hearing requirement.
- Gives cities an option for a new municipal "street improvement" district that will collect property taxes for up to 10 years.
- Jacks up a host of sin taxes from alcohol to tobacco.
- Levies a tax on digital downloads like iTunes.

The Senate lowlights:

- Increases all income tax rates and adds a fourth tier.
- Increases Alternative Minimum Tax (AMT) rate.
- Repeals Northstar Rail sales tax exemption.
- Allows Met Council to tax to subsidize mass transit.

While raising taxes always stifles growth and wealth creation, raising taxes during a severe economic crisis is nothing short of legislative malpractice. Consider the income tax. Many small businesses file their business taxes on the individual income schedule. Thus, when the income tax is raised, this becomes a higher tax on small businesses. It doesn't take an economist to see that when small businesses have more taken, they have less available to spend on employee benefits, capital equipment, and other truly stimulative expenditures.

How about the mortgage interest deduction? Every person who has a mortgage has counted on the mortgage interest deduction, which has been in the tax code for many decades. Does it really make sense to make home buying more expensive and push even more prospective buyers out of the market?

Finally, although the Watchdog doesn't have a problem with Northstar rail getting shafted on the sales tax exemption, the Dog does have a problem that the provision was put in the Senate tax bill in the first place. Anoka County has put numerous lobbyists on the public payroll to hang out at the Capitol. These knuckleheads couldn't even keep this provision out. Maybe too much time down at the Lexington with Dan Erhart and not enough time sitting in committee paying attention - AND EARNING YOUR PAY!

<http://www.cfboard.state.mn.us/lobby/adetail/a3135.html>

<http://www.cfboard.state.mn.us/lobby/adetail/a3617.html>

<http://www.cfboard.state.mn.us/lobby/adetail/a4977.html>

If this repeal stands as law, Anoka County taxpayers will have the sales tax payments thrust back upon them.

Way to go, Anoka County.

E-mail Update 5/1/09

In This Issue:

1. Harold Hamilton is my President.
2. The "Spectacle" of RINOs.
3. We knew the dangers of sub-prime lending 63 years ago.
4. State Employee Treated "Unfairly."
5. Rally Time.

1. Harold Hamilton is my President.

Congratulations to Watchdog founder Harold Hamilton, who last night was named as the next president of the Freedom Club. The Freedom Club is Minnesota's most influential political organization dedicated to promoting and electing candidates who stand for free markets and limited government.

2. The "Spectacle" of RINOs.

It has been amusing and annoying all at once to watch Republican moderates don sackcloth and tear at their breasts regarding the defection of Senator Arlen Specter to the democrats, bringing them one vote closer to unchecked power in Washington.

Senator Olympia Snowe (R-Maine) was the first one to craft a somber dirge lamenting "the Spectacle" while throwing about platitudes about the "devaluation of diversity" and the lack of "inclusiveness" in the GOP. If Snowe ever leaves politics, she has a bright future writing manuals for diversity training at any major college campus in California. Apparently, the GOP in Washington has been just too damned conservative for her liking.

In classic diversity-speak, Snow also absolved Specter of any responsibility for his action and placed blame squarely upon the Party she relies on every six years to give her money, resources, and volunteers. "But it is truly a dangerous signal that a Republican senator of nearly three decades no longer felt able to remain in the party," Snowe informs us.

What is missing, of course, is a precise listing of exactly what conservative views or actions led to "the Spectacle." What exactly led to this "dangerous signal?" If conservatives and their dangerous views have been so toxic, why not list them?

Could it have been a commitment to reduced federal spending and smaller government? George Bush, with the gleeful help of GOP legislators, increased federal spending at a higher rate than the previous six occupants of the White House, including Jimmy Carter and LBJ. Adjusted for inflation, Bill Clinton increased federal spending 11%, while Bush increased it 104%. I guess we can cross "limited spending" off the "dangerous signal" list.

How about pork-barrel earmarks? Did a commitment to reducing earmarks and increasing transparency offend "moderates?" Nope. There wasn't a damn's worth of earmark reform under Republican rule. We only need point to the omnibus Transportation bill that contained over 6,000 earmarks to see how successful conservatives were in limiting this disgraceful practice.

Maybe it was a commitment to honoring federalism by leaving states run education? No, again. No Child Left Behind was a Republican love child.

Perhaps a commitment to limiting the entitlement programs that are eating us alive fiscally? No, no, and no. Medicare Part "D", the largest expansion of Medicare in a generation was passed by Republicans and signed into law by Bush.

How about a commitment to ethical behavior that eschews careerism and using one's office for personal gain? Whoops. Duke Cunningham and Mark Foley sort of burned that bridge.

So, Senator Snowe, perhaps you could indulge the Watchdog and explain exactly what you mean when you insinuate that conservatives are to blame for the GOP's current predicament.

The more likely answer is that the GOP lost credibility with voters of every stripe because of a legacy of runaway spending and integrity issues. The way back is a commitment to honor our values as articulated by the Party platform. Whether your selling vacuums or ideas, the surest way to lose a customer is to fail to deliver on your stated promises.

Moreover, let's cut through the BS and get to the root of this problem. "The Spectacle" was nothing more than a naked political calculation solely regarding what the Senator thought was his best chance to keep his butt in Washington, because 30 years just isn't enough. Specter himself admitted that he consulted polls showing him losing as a Republican. Ambition, not ideology or conscience, drove this choice. So spare us the drama, Olympia.

Second, conservatives need to keep this all in perspective. Arelen Specter never really was with the team. He embraced democrats and their bills whenever and wherever it suited him. The last straw was his vote supporting the \$700 billion Wall Street bailout, complete with bonus payments to the same executives who drove their companies into the ground in the first place. It would be hard for Specter to support the Democrats any more than he already did.

Nice try, Olympia. Scapegoating conservatives may be popular sport for some, but the complaint is about as legitimate as pro wrestling.

3. We knew the dangers of sub-prime lending 63 years ago. "Economics in One Lesson" has been on Harold Hamilton's recommended reading list for many years. First written in 1946, it is undoubtedly one of the most concise and correct explanations of economics to be found.

For those who doubt the relevance of a book written just after World War II, read the following excerpt:

The case against government-guaranteed loans and mortgages to private businesses and persons is almost as strong as, though less obvious than, the case against direct government loans and mortgages. The advocates of government-guaranteed mortgages also forget that what is being lent is ultimately real capital, which is in limited supply, and that they are helping an identified "B" at the expense of some unidentified "A." Government-guaranteed home mortgages, especially when a negligible down payment or no down payment whatever is required, inevitably mean more bad loans than otherwise. They force the general taxpayer to subsidize the bas risks and to defray the losses. They encourage people to "buy" houses they cannot really afford. They tend eventually to bring about an oversupply of houses as compared to other things. They temporarily overstimulate building, raise the cost of building for everybody (including the buyers of the homes with the guaranteed mortgages), and may mislead the building industry into an eventually costly overexpansion. In brief, in the long run they do not increase overall national production but encourage malinvestment.

SOUND FAMILIAR?

4. State Employee Treated "Unfairly."

It didn't take long for the union-inspired letter writing campaign to begin bemoaning the plight of state employees who face the prospect of unpaid furloughs as part of the state budget solution.

This week's letters to the editor in the Coon Rapids Herald featured a piece entitled "unfair proposal" from state employee John LeBreche who toils in a "Work Force" center in Blaine.

LeBreche is concerned that his services, which he deems "vital to the economic health of our state", won't be fully utilized if he's forced to miss 24 days of work over a 2-year period.

More than likely, LeBreche is a member of the MAPE union. Let's take a look at what senior MAPE state employees get in the way of time off work:

- 12 paid holidays
- 29 days of vacation
- 13 days of sick leave

What's an extra 12 days per year, Mr. LeBeche? If you're worried about being away from work and not providing services "vital to the economic health of our state," the Dog looks forward to your next letter stating that state employees get too much paid time off.

5. Rally Time.

We know you haven't forgotten about the annual Tax Cut Rally happening tomorrow at the State Capitol from 11-2, featuring Governor Pawlenty and Jason Lewis. The odds are good that the legislature will be in session that day, so you can pop in and warn your legislator that you will be watching their votes on all things fiscal!

E-mail Update 5/8/09

In This Issue:

1. Cleanliness is next to...
2. Metro North Blaine Airport Power Play.
3. Rules are for Republicans, goals are for DFLers.
4. Do dogs speak Spanish?
5. State Rep. Kurt Zellers Reports.

1. Cleanliness is next to...

The Upper Midwest Pagan Alliance seems to have the best of intentions. When they aren't worshipping golden cows or running naked in the moonlit wilderness, these masters of the dark arts are doing their civic duty by participating in the "Adopt a Highway" program, presumably because there is not yet an "adopt a sacrificial virgin" program.

Apparently these popes of pentagram treat the old aphorism that "cleanliness is next to godliness" like a case of the swine flu, because their assigned stretch of Highway 10 (near Hanson Blvd.) is a real goat sty. The median and ditches in that area are filled with debris (no confirmation yet that the debris includes goat carcasses and the blood of the unbelievers).

C'mon guys, get busy. Pitchforks are perfect for spearing those Twinkies wrappers and banana peels. WWSD?

2. Metro North Blaine Airport Power Play.

Is Metro North Chamber executive director Tom Snell puppet or tyrant? He's probably both, especially when he's on a mission to do the bidding of the Good Ol' Boys.

This past Wednesday, Snell shoved a resolution supporting the 6,000 foot runway at the Blaine airport through the Chamber's governmental affairs committee, despite the fact that many in attendance thought it prudent to wait for more information.

Moreover, Snell unceremoniously kicked out private citizens who were there merely to observe the meeting.

All of this comes on top of Snell's rebuff of Harold Hamilton's request to poll Chamber membership regarding the runway proposal.

Chamber members should demand that the Chamber's name not be lent to this proposal unless there is a fair and thorough comment process that allows for members to weigh in on the subject. If the Chamber approves this, the Good Ol' Boys will waive the approval resolution in the face of legislators in Saint Paul as proof that the people of Anoka County want this project.

By the way, concerned citizens have an opportunity to weigh in on a resolution of their own. Concerned Citizens of the North Metro (CCNM) is mounting a campaign to persuade the Blaine City Council to pass a resolution opposing the runway expansion.

CCNM is asking supporters to pack the council chamber on May 21st in support of the resolution.

More information may be found at the group's web site.

3. Rules are for Republicans, goals are for DFLers.

The large DFL majorities in both the House and Senate have been especially oppressive this session in applying procedural rules to the GOP minority. In particular, Republicans have chafed under unprecedented rules limiting the amount of time that may be spent debating a bill. In the Minnesota legislature, the majority exercises a great deal of influence. Offering amendments to bills is one of the few ways the minority can influence legislation. With DFL imposed time limits, the number of amendments that may be offered is limited, thus emasculating one of the few tools the minority has at its disposal.

But when the DFL majority applies to the rules to themselves, they somehow find a bit more leniency in their big ol' bleeding hearts.

Take House-Senate Joint Rule 2.03, which imposes deadlines for passing legislation. This permanent rule, modified for this session, states explicitly that "The fifth deadline, May 7, 2009, is for conference committees on omnibus appropriation and tax bills to report bills to the floor." This week, DFL Speaker Margaret Anderson Kelliher admitted that the DFL won't meet this deadline. What's particularly galling is that she and her willing media co-conspirators called this rule a "goal." Really? The Watchdog looks forward to Rep. Kelliher treating the rules as "goals" when applied to Republicans.

4. Do dogs speak Spanish?

This question was famously explored by famous anchorman Ron Burgundy once upon a time.

This questions was once again explored this week on the August floor of the Minnesota House of Representatives when Representative Frank Hornstein presented a critical bill that would require retail outlets to post a notice that dogs can get sick from eating coca beans.

Rep. Hornstein apparently believes that dogs bark in English because his bill requires that:

The notice must be in 36-point type or larger and state:

"The ingestion of cocoa bean shell mulch that has not been processed to be

nontoxic is poisonous to pets. If a pet has eaten unprocessed cocoa bean shell mulch, you should immediately contact a veterinarian or the Animal Poison Control Center at (888) 426-4435."

Yes, this is what your legislature is doing with just 10 days left to resolve a \$4.6 billion budget deficit. If there is a special session, taxpayers can rest assured that at least the cocoa bean issue was settled during the regular session.

Your tax dollars at work.

5. State Rep. Kurt Zellers Reports.

State Representative Kurt Zellers (R - Maple Grove) wants all loyal watchdogs to know what the DFL is attempting to impose on you in the way of tax hikes. As a member of the Taxes committee, Zellers can give you a first-hand account of the foolishness:

TAXING JOE SIX PACK'S, SIX PACK

As the Legislative Session enters its final month; I wanted to bring voters up to date on where we have been, what's left and how the Legislative Leaders in the House and Senate plan to address our budget deficit and balance the budget before the May 18th deadline.

Long before the beginning of the Legislative session in January, the Leaders in St. Paul knew we were going to face a budget deficit. Then at the end of February, we were given the bad news that the deficit would exceed \$6 billion. Governor Pawlenty had released his budget and the only question remaining was when the Democrat Leaders in St. Paul would release their plans.

This last week we finally had the bill and the details of the taxes they want to raise on Minnesotans. Up until the vote on the tax bills, they had told us they were only going to "tax the rich", or, "...make those who can most afford, it pay their fair share." After looking at this bill, I think most Minnesotans will come to same conclusion I did and would support my emphatic 'NO' vote on these massive and oppressive tax increases.

As expected, income tax increases were one of the first taxes to be raised by both the House and Senate Democrat bills. The House bill raises taxes on individuals making \$56,561 a year from an already oppressive 7% to a bone crushing 8%! And if you are a married couple filing jointly whose combined income is over \$100,000, your rates would go up to the same 8%. The proposal also creates a new, 4th bracket to tax filers over \$300,000. This bracket is almost all small business owners who file their business and personal taxes together and will effectively decimate all small business growth and expansion in Minnesota.

The Senate Democrat bill raises taxes on ALL income brackets; starting with single filers who make \$17,570 and couples filing \$25,680! They also create a new 4th bracket

with a 9.25% tax rate! What happened to taxing "the rich"? What happened to tax "fairness"?

But Democrats in St. Paul didn't stop at income. The House tax bill goes after one of the most sacred deductions we all use and one that is most beneficial to young families - the ability to deduct the interest you pay for your home mortgage. Did you know that even during the Great Depression NO ONE in our government took away the taxpayers ability to deduct their mortgage interest? But the insatiable appetite for more government spending in St. Paul has lead them to believe it's a good idea to take this away from hard working Minnesota taxpayers. I believe this is fundamentally wrong and my primary reason for voting 'NO' on the bill.

But they weren't satisfied with income and mortgage deductions. The House plan takes away your ability to deduct charitable donations and if you donate an organ (yes, one of your body parts). It also raises taxes each time you or you kids download music, videos or books to your iPod. And lastly they think it's a good idea to raise taxes on Joe Six Pack's six pack, alcohol, wine and a .52 cent increase on cigarettes.

Our financial troubles are too serious to waste time and energy on taxes that will kill jobs and take more out of the family budget. Governor Pawlenty has said he will veto all of these oppressive and job killing taxes. I will stand with Governor Pawlenty and uphold any veto override attempts.

E-mail Update 5/15/09

In This Issue:

1. Government has too much money.
2. Government has too much power.
3. Is MetroNorth Chamber pro-business or pro-government?
4. Quote of the week.

1. Government has too much money.

There has been no shortage of local officials who have taken to the nearest available microphone to decry state aid cuts to cities. Predictably, these officials have trotted out the old chestnuts regarding "cutting to the bone" and adjectives like "devastating" and "horrific" to describe the fiscal carnage that will ensue if Governor Pawlenty doesn't come through with the welfare checks for cities. Heck, there's even a web site devoted to LGA propaganda.

So how is a city like Blaine dealing with the fiscal carnage? They're apparently going golfing. According to a recent article in the Blaine Banner, the city has invested significant funds in the 3M Champions Golf Tournament with little to show in return.

In 2008, the city spent \$122,000 to participate in the Tournament. It appears the money is used both for direct purchases of goods (e.g. alcohol and promotional materials) and a "donation" which gives the city use of a skybox on the 18th hole.

This year, the city has again been billed in the amount of \$100,000 as a "donation" in exchange for a skybox and other access.

The city justifies the expense under the rubric of "economic development." The city claims that all the boozing, snacking, and hobnobbing at taxpayer expense is nothing less than heavy lifting on the part of city elected officials and bureaucrats to lure new business to the city. The only problem is the city is unable to name any business that has located to Blaine as a result of contacts made at the tournament.

In this economic environment, such an extravagance is certainly one of the expenditures the city should eliminate, especially since there has no demonstrable return on taxpayer investment.

Without any tangible benefit to taxpayers, participation in this tournament looks like nothing more than a local junket for the city council and select city officials. No taxpayer should foot the bill for city officials to sit around watching golf while sucking down booze and snacks.

This is an abuse of the taxpayer that would make Dan Erhart and Anoka County proud. In fact, Anoka County is a sponsor of the tournament, along with the city of Blaine.

The Watchdog calls on the Blaine City Council to suspend the practice of using taxpayer dollars to pay for city officials to screw off at the golf course instead of doing the people's work.

2. Government has too much power.

Another complaint of the local government crowd is that state aid cuts will negatively impact core governmental services like police and fire protection.

After the information the Watchdog received this week, we can only conclude that either the City of Coon Rapids has too many police officers or their priorities are supremely misguided.

In early May, a Watchdog who lives in Coon Rapids received a letter from Coon Rapids Police Chief Steve Wells. The letter noted that the Police Department knew that the citizen was maintaining three pets in his home in violation of City Ordinance 6-200. (The letter didn't specify how the city came to know that fact. Maybe an undercover informant? Perhaps surveillance? Satellite imagery?)

The citizen owns three small dogs, which are kept indoors except for small amounts of time spent in a fenced backyard exercising.

If you live in Coon Rapids and own three dogs or cats, here's what the city requires in order to enjoy those pets:

- \$140 fee;
- A survey mailed to your neighbors;
- A property inspection conducted by the police department;
- A public meeting notice sent to neighbors;
- A review by the Multiple Pet Permit Committee;
- Possible referral to Anoka County Mediation Services of unresolved issues between the pet owner and neighbor;
- Appeal rights to the full city council.

This is legislative overkill in the extreme. Remember that this citizen owned three small dogs and has no history of complaints made by neighbors. By all accounts, there were no issues with the dogs.

Geez, don't you just feel safe in Coon Rapids knowing that law enforcement resources are being used to track down evil doers who might possess a couple of dogs or cats without the blessing of the Multiple Pet Permit Committee?

We don't need more cops on the street. We need the ones we have engaged in more important enforcement activities.

3. Is MetroNorth Chamber pro-business or pro-government?

The Anoka County Watchdog has been frequently critical of positions adopted by the Chamber that are at odds with a pro-business agenda. Any pro-business agenda should be anchored by the principle of limited government. Yet the Chamber has supported increased property taxes for school levies and Northstar rail and increased sales taxes for projects like the Vikings stadium all of which failed to provide any empirical data that businesses as a whole would benefit.

In fairness, any service organization should be responsive to the desires of its membership. When one reviews the make-up of the MetroNorth Chamber, it is easy to see why the Chamber could be construed as a pro-government organization instead of a pro-business organization.

The following organizations, which lack a profit motive and are dependent on government funding in whole or in part, belong to the Chamber:

City of Andover
Anoka Conservation District
Anoka County Aviation Association
Anoka County Community Action
Anoka County Government Center
Anoka County Integrated Waste Management
Anoka County Library
Anoka County Travel Management
Anoka Technical College
Anoka-Hennepin Educational Foundation
Anoka-Ramsey Community College
CEAP, Inc.
City of Blaine
City of Coon Rapids
Coon Creek Watershed District
City of East Bethel
Fridley Historical Society
Saint Francis School District
Spring Lake Park School District
International Baccalaureate District #11
City of Lino Lakes
Mediation Services for Anoka County
Minnesota Workforce Center - Anoka County
City of Ramsey

Rest assured, this is a very conservative list that excluded many non-profits that receive government funding. If the Watchdog were to make a list of Chamber members that excluded all private, for-profit members, the list would have been much longer.

This state of affairs is problematic for a number of reasons. First, government and non-profit organizations rely on tax dollars either in whole or in part. Thus, they have no interest in pursuing policies that limit the size and scope of government. In fact, they want just the opposite.

Second, these groups possess the ability to "stack" Chamber meetings to influence Chamber positions on issues. The Watchdog has many times witnessed Anoka County or a local school district pack Governmental Affairs Committee meetings to influence the debate and the vote. The government employees who stack the meetings are paid to be there while many small business owners can't attend because they can't get away from work.

Finally, it is nothing short of galling to know that these organizations pay membership dues with tax dollars taken from private sectors members. It's a real kick in the backside to realize that these government groups are using dollars taken from small businesses to influence positions that hurt those same small businesses.

If the Chamber had any fortitude, it would pass a bylaw forbidding governmental and non-profit members from voting on any Chamber matter.

4. Quote of the Week.

"To expect the public in general to inform itself well enough to make a reasoned decision is, frankly, silly."

State Representative Bill Hilty on whether or not Minnesotans should decide for themselves if the ban on new nuclear power plants should be repealed.

Those DFLers sure are champions of the people. Just as long as the idiots shut up and do what their legislative masters tell them.

E-mail Update 5/22/09

In This Issue:

1. It's all over; now for the shouting;
2. Worshipping at the altar of fiscal restraint - cafeteria style;
3. Northstar rail - even the recession can't stop the stupidity.

1. It's all over; now for the shouting.

The 2009 legislative session ended with a meek whimper at the stroke of midnight Monday night. The 2009 session was singularly defined by the debate over taxes and the response to an unprecedented \$6.4 billion budget deficit. While taxes and spending always a priority in Saint Paul, all other issues shrank in comparison this year. In the end, Governor Pawlenty and Republicans won big while the DFL and its leadership lost - in a big way. Here's why.

House Republicans.

Since the Senate GOP doesn't even have the numbers to sustain a veto, it was up to House Minority Leaders Marty Seifert and his band of 47 House members to sustain Pawlenty's vetoes of the DFL's tax onslaught. For better or worse, Seifert would be judged solely by his ability to keep all 47 members united on this defining issue. Given the numbers, the DFL would need unanimity plus 3 GOP votes to override. Moreover, any defections at all would undercut the GOP's message that it stood for low taxes and fiscal restraint in the face of a massive economic downturn.

Seifert passed the test with flying colors. He kept his team united and burnished his credentials in GOP circles as an up and coming leader.

Governor Pawlenty.

Pawlenty absolutely outflanked and faked out the DFL with his bold decision to solve the budget deficit with through his executive powers regarding line-item vetoes and unallotment. DFL Senate Majority Leader Larry Pogemiller and DFL House Speaker Margaret Kelliher were left looking for the jocks after Pawlenty head-faked them.

Pawlenty grabbed the mantle of leadership and looked like the adult in the room by declaring the he would make the tough decisions if the DFL wouldn't. By doing so, Pawlenty declared that there would be no special session or government shutdown. Pawlenty thus avoided the wrath of voters who are rightfully exasperated by special sessions while making the DFL look inept and incompetent.

The Governor will also reap the political benefits of balancing the budget without raising taxes. Voters instinctively understand that raising taxes in a recession is a bad idea. They are quite receptive to the message that government should live within its means. And by the way, GOP voters in primary states across the country are even more receptive to such leadership.

It is unlikely the governor will suffer any negative effects of "owning" the cuts since he alone will implement them. After all, they amount to only about 3% of the budget. Most taxpayers will soon realize that life in Minnesota can actually go on even though the state had to make do with a 3% cut.

Moreover, to be brutally honest, those who will complain most loudly about the cuts are folks who never supported Pawlenty anyway. The dependency class of government workers, able-bodied welfare recipients, and professional protesters would have complained regardless of what the governor did.

In short, Pawlenty and Republicans provided a clear, concise, consistent message that was easy to understand and resonated with voters: live within your means.

The DFL.

These folks lost and lost big. They made every wrong move. Let us count the ways.

First, they violated the fundamental rule of politics that you should never propose a tax that isn't implemented. They further committed a cardinal sin by proposing a bevy of unpopular tax hikes, touching a number of political "third rails" in the process.

When a politician proposes a tax that doesn't come to fruition, he wins no friends. The voters who opposed the tax will be angry that it was proposed in the first place while those who supported the tax hike will be angry that the politician failed to deliver.

Moreover, if you're going to propose tax hikes, for goodness sakes, propose the popular ones. The DFL did do that by proposing the golden oldies of taxing the rich and taxing sins like alcohol.

But the DFL went far beyond that by proposing across-the-board income tax increases, taxing music downloads, and taking away the mortgage interest deduction. And while the mortgage interest deduction issue is more complex than that, the DFL committed yet another cardinal sin by proposing something that is difficult to explain yet easy to criticize.

Thus, the DFL firmly cemented their reputation as tax increasers who can't manage a budget and are beholden to Big Government special interests.

Second, the DFL never had a coherent message. Despite the fact that everyone in Minnesota knew as far back as last fall that there was a fiscal crisis, the DFL dallied and vacillated, never giving the public a clear message or clear plan for closing the budget gap.

It all started with their refusal to acknowledge what everyone knew: they were going to propose tax increases. By refusing early on to acknowledge "revenue enhancers," they denied themselves the time and space needed to explain why more taxes were needed and build support within and without the Capitol walls.

This fundamental failure to build support for tax increases culminated in the embarrassing House floor vote in which the DFL tax bill passed by one vote. This was the defining moment of the 2009 session and signaled clearly to the DFL that Pawlenty would win on the tax issue.

After that, it was clear that the DFL plan was to run out the clock and wait for yet another special session for a chance to redeem themselves. The chance never came.

After the House tax vote, the DFL appeared to be off message, confused, and demoralized. They compounded their errors by passing other spending bills that didn't balance - which played perfectly into GOP hands by buttressing the charge that DFLers are fiscally irresponsible spenders. The DFL made a weak attempt to cover their collective butts by passing a tax bill that balanced their spending with exactly 8 MINUTES, yes minutes, left in session.

Finally, the DFL looked plain silly responding to Pawlenty's plan to solve the budget deficit himself. Cries of "abuse of power" and the threat of lawsuits - by other people no less - isn't leadership or even a credible alternative. Nor is the prospect of another "misery tour." We've been there and done that. It is clear that Democrats have used "misery tours" as little more than an excuse for inaction. At the end of the day, the public expects leadership and decisive action. The DFL provided neither.

The story of the 2009 session is a tale of two parties. The GOP responded to the call of leadership and made the tough decisions necessary in responding to crisis.

The DFL, on the other hand, shrank from their leadership obligations by dallying, vacillating, and ultimately providing a piecemeal plan that went nowhere. When the going got tough, they punted. Town hall meetings, federal monopoly money, and special sessions are no substitute for leadership.

2. Worshipping at the altar of fiscal restraint - cafeteria style.

While Democrats are hypocrites for many reasons, their situational condemnation of governmental borrowing is the Mother of All Hypocrisies.

Local DFL activist Mel Aanerud is a classic example. His letter to the editor in last week's Anoka County Union (again, no disclosure of his partisan affiliation) criticized Governor Pawlenty's plan to borrow against future tobacco monies to help solve the state's budget problem.

While it is certainly proper to question the merits of that proposal, it is hypocritical to condemn government debt only when incurred by Republicans.

In an annual right of spring in the even-numbered years, DFLers will abandon their false allegiance to the principle of "pay as you go" in order to support a massive state

"bonding" bill that will put upwards of a billion dollars on the state credit card. Moreover, many of these projects will be of the porky type, typified by previous projects to build sheet music museums, gorilla cages, and interpretive centers.

The Watchdog looks forward to Anerud's letter condemning the 2010 DFL borrowing bill. Heck, we would even settle for a letter criticizing the generational theft the Obama administration is practicing to bail out Wall Street and Detroit.

3. Northstar rail - even the recession can't stop the stupidity. You would think with all the controversy over earmarks and the massive, massive deficits being run up in Washington, our elected officials would practice just a touch of fiscal restraint.

Kudos to Rep. Michele Bachmann for doing just that. Last week, Bachmann was criticized by the media elites and the Washington careerists for refusing to sign off on an earmark request to extend Northstar commuter rail from Big Lake to Saint Cloud.

The earmark would cost the taxpayers upwards of \$150 million we don't have; unless, of course, we go to our Chinese bank masters to get it.

Here the kicker, Watchdogs. The reason an earmark is needed to get the funds is because the extension to Saint Cloud DOESN'T MEET THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT'S OWN COST-BENEFIT ANALYSIS. That's precisely the reason why the line was stopped at Big Lake in the first place. Rest assured, the article notes that pork king Rep. Jim Oberstar is working hard to rewrite the cost-benefit rules so the Saint Cloud extension will make the grade.

How disgusting. This is precisely why we're in the mess we're in. Shame on all these clowns who are ripping off our children and grandchildren.

E-mail Update 5/29/09

In This Issue:

1. Runway Opposition Builds.
2. Real Estate Trouble for the Heights.
3. County Says "Never Mind."
4. New Kid in Town.

1. Runway Opposition Builds.

The Blaine City Council recently expressed its collective intent to formally oppose any runway expansion at the Blaine Regional Airport.

Last Thursday, the Council directed staff to craft a formal resolution of opposition to be considered at the June 4th Council meeting.

The news was met with cheers from concerned citizens who packed the Council chambers.

The news was yet another victory for taxpayers who united to fight the expansion ever since learning that Anoka County attempted to ram through a resolution of support without following the County's own committee process or holding public hearings. This is yet another example of the County copping an arrogant attitude towards the very people it serves. What Dan Erhart and crew don't realize is that the County lost credibility with the citizens a long time ago and is now reaping the bitter harvest of mistrust and suspicion it so richly deserves.

Key Air, which has ties to the Good Ol' Boy network, has been seeking to add 1,000 feet to the length of the runway while increasing the wheel-weight capacity from 60,000 pounds to 95,000 pounds. These changes would allow larger, louder planes to use the airport.

Mayor Tom Ryan noted that the council has always supported that airport being classified as a "minor" airport. In fact, a November 1999 Council resolution states "The Council acknowledges that the Comprehensive Plan designates the airport as 'Minor', and the Council does not support upgrading the airport to 'Intermediate' status."

Council members Kolb and Bourke also raise their concerns with the Anoka County Board. Good idea, even though Sivarajah and West are the only two who care what taxpayers think.

Council member Clark also encouraged citizens to contact their state and federal representatives as well.

If Blaine formally adopts a resolution of opposition, it would join Lexington, Circle Pines, Lino Lakes, and Mounds View in opposing the runway expansion. Can Ham Lake be far behind?

It looks like the MetroNorth Chamber of Commerce is the only organization that has been receptive to the runway scheme.

You can thank the Blaine Council here.
Watchdogs can contact the County Board here.
State Rep. Tim Sanders can be reached here.
State Sen. Don Betzold can be reached here.
Congresswoman Michele Bachmann here.
Senator Amy Klobuchar here.

Get after it, Watchdogs! Key Air has paid lobbyists hard at work.

EDITOR'S NOTE: This item was based on eyewitness accounts and the article that appeared in the Anoka County Union, which is linked above.

2. Real Estate Trouble for the Heights.

If there's one thing that Watchdogs know, it is that eternal vigilance is the price of freedom. If government is thwarted once regarding a dumb idea, you can bet they'll be back again and again.

Last summer, the City of Columbia Heights abandoned a highly unpopular "Residential Inspection Before Sale" program that would have required private citizens to have their home inspected by the city before putting it on the market.

Here they go again. Donna Schmitt, who serves on the city's Planning and Zoning Commission, tells the Watchdog that the program may be coming back. Here's what she told us:

Whether they call it Residential Inspection Before Sale (RIBS), Time of Sale (TOS), Point of Sale (POS), Truth in Sale, or Truth in Housing, or invent another acronym it all means the same. Columbia Heights is looking at bringing back the Residential Inspection Before Sale program. The city will be offering several resident informational meetings and meeting with realtors to explain their reason for looking at this again.

What amazes me is that this very item was presented to the city last summer and over 150 people packed out the city council chambers bringing a very effective case as to why this was not a good idea. After listening to numerous citizens the city council reversed their decision and voted against this type of ordinance. The council did come back a few months later and passed the same type of ordinance but it affects only foreclosed or abandoned homes. The city also has a detailed inspection program for rental properties. When this second inspection ordinance was passed we were reassured by Mayor Peterson that they did get the message that the original RIBS inspection program would not be reconsidered.

It is time that residents need to stay aware of what this city council is doing. Go to the

informational meetings. (At the time of this writing, no dates have been set.) There is a realtor's informational meeting to be held on Wednesday, May 20 but you will need to contact the city for the time. Start coming to city council meetings. City council meetings are held on the 2nd and 4th Monday in the city council chambers. City Council Work Sessions are held the 1st Monday of the month. If you can't make it to a meeting watch the city council meeting on the local cable channel. If you can't do that, make sure that you read the minutes and agendas from city council meetings that are available on the city website or available from the city offices. Since this item was reintroduced at the EDA meeting, it is time that residents start attending those meetings as well. The next EDA meeting will be held on May 27th at 7:00 p.m. in the City Conference Room.

The city staff have accused us of being misinformed about the original ordinance. Yet many residents gave very convincing arguments against the inspection ordinance otherwise this council would not have changed it's opinion about the benefits of the original ordinance. The council had the audacity to claim that "they got the message" and yet they are now reconsidering this program.

The only council member that seems to be convinced that this is not a good idea is Mr. Nawrocki. At the May 11th city council meeting, Mr. Nawrocki brought up the fact that the city was reintroducing this ordinance and was accused by the city manager, Mr. Fehst that this was incorrect and that this was a lie. Yet, in looking at the EDA minutes from March, it is stated over and over that RIBS is going to be introduced.

It is time to make sure that this city is doing what it promised and not misrepresenting its citizens. Watch for articles in the paper, watch for the summer newsletter from the city, read the letters to the editor, watch the council meetings, stay informed. Let's hold our city accountable for its promises. Maybe they will be able to present a convincing argument. But at this point I am very skeptical and I know there are many citizens in this community that share my opinion.

It looks like the city has adopted the same "I'm smarter than the taxpayer" attitude that has infected our county commissioners.

Contact the Council here.

3. County Says "Never Mind."

When you serve as an Anoka County commissioner, you'd better buy a set of hip-boots. Why? Because the County steps in the manure so often loafers or high heels just wouldn't survive.

Whether it's blowing a cool million on a football stadium gambit, cramming a runway expansion down people's throat, or spending thousands on meals and junkets, the commissioners (except West and Sivarajah) just find a way to piss people off (except Tom Snell and the MetroNorth Chamber).

The latest example concerns the county Housing and Redevelopment Authority (HRA). The Watchdog reported on this issue back in April. Readers will recall that the county's crackerjack contract attorney penned a bizarre legal opinion claiming that the county had the obligation to tax every city for HRA funds, even if the city had it's own HRA. This ran counter to a long-standing policy the county had to respect city HRAs and not tax in cities that had one.

Moreover, the typical Good Ol' Boy shenanigans were at work. The opinion was authored in early 2008 but wasn't presented to the HRA board for over a year.

In any case, the uproar has apparently caused the attorney to craft a new opinion letter that rescinds the original opinion letter and essentially ratifies the long-standing taxing policy.

Way to go, Perry Mason. How much did you bill the taxpayers to research and write the new opinion that covers your behind for the previous screw up?

4. New Kid in Town.

Watchdogs in Hennepin County rejoice! There's a new taxpayer watchdog site devoted to exposing governmental waste, fraud, and abuse in that jurisdiction.

The site is run by former state Representative and current Hennepin County commissioner Jeff Johnson. Here's the press release for the site:

I'm writing to invite you to take a look at the new blog that I launched earlier today: Hennepin County Taxpayer Watchdog (www.TaxpayerWatchdog.org).

As you know, I've only been on the Hennepin County Board for a few months, but in that short time I've learned a lot and have been amazed at the reach of the \$1.7 billion annual county budget (larger than several state budgets) and the sometimes curious (and sometimes outrageous) ways this money is spent. As Hennepin County government actions largely fly under the media radar screen - despite our tremendous impact on your individual and business property taxes - I felt it time to provide an insider perspective.

While the Anoka County Watchdog isn't affiliated with this web site, we're excited to see this development and wish Johnson the best of luck tracking the big spenders across the river. Moreover, we can use all the help we can get tracking the misdeeds of everyone's favorite "moderate," Meli\$\$a Hortman.

Good luck, Jeff!

E-mail Update 6/5/09

In This Issue:

1. City of Blaine engages in real estate speculation.
2. Meli\$\$a Hortman says defamation okay as long as phrased correctly.

1. City of Blaine engages in real estate speculation.

The City of Blaine has seen its stock fall, rise, then fall again in the eyes of the County's premier public policy group, the Anoka County Watchdog. In a previous newsletter, it was revealed that the city continues to subsidize a golf tournament that has produced no tangible economic benefits for taxpayers - that's bad. Last week, the Dog praised the city for its informal (soon to be formal) opposition to a runway expansion at the Blaine Airport - that's good.

The city has now landed back in the Dog's house for an impending purchase of private land. The city is on the verge of buying an 80-acre property that was at the heart of the County's aborted attempt to build a Vikings stadium - an attempt that cost the taxpayers nearly \$1 million.

The city plans to engage in a bit of real estate speculation by holding the land for a period and then "flip" a portion of it for a profit. "It's a good future purchase for us," said Mayor Tom Ryan. If it's a good future purchase, a private entity would buy the property and hold it for appreciation purposes.

At a price tag of nearly \$2 million, the city is making a large wager on the real estate market. Let's face it, real estate speculation isn't a proper function of municipal government, especially during a recession. For all those who think this a good idea, maybe the city could also start a hedge fund or use taxpayer monies to purchase derivative investments or perhaps buy some stock options in emerging markets.

It looks like cities are better off than their cries of poverty heard at Capitol news conferences.

2. Meli\$\$a Hortman says defamation okay as long as phrased correctly.

The only certainty we have in life is death, taxes, and the perpetual need for the Hortman Unit. Minnesota's favorite "moderate" pulled off her legislator hat in favor of the lawyer hat this week when she served as co-counsel for state Rep. Paul Gardner, who was the subject of an ethics complaint.

Gardner admitted that he used his Twitter account to make disparaging remarks about two colleagues, who complained that the "tweets" amounted to defamation.

Hortman's presumably pro-bono client was sentenced to an apology for his words, but the real curiosity came in the form of this legal gem from Meli\$\$a, according to the Anoka County Union:

"Rep. Melissa Hortman, DFL-Brooklyn Park, an attorney who assisted Gardner during the hearing, argued that Gardner's comments did not constitute defamation under state law because they were questions - ending with question marks."

So, as long as there's a question mark at the end, anything can be said? Is Meli\$\$a nuts? Is she an incompetent attorney? Is she a homicidal axe murderer?

After politics, it looks like Hortman has a career ahead of her writing HRA opinion letters.

E-mail Update 6/12/09

In This Issue:

1. Watchdogs win!
2. Golf Links Lunacy.
3. Coon Rapids community center draws concern.
4. Has New Brighton cut to the bone?

1. Watchdogs win!

Anoka County Watchdogs scored a major victory this week when Key Air withdrew its proposal to extend and improve a runway at the Blaine Airport.

The effort, led by Concerned Citizens of the North Metro, is the second major victory scored by taxpayers in Anoka County, the first being the victory over the Vikings stadium.

The key to victory was a sophisticated grassroots effort that was organized early. Early organization is imperative because government is always better funded and thus has the ability to disseminate propaganda that will be perceived as truth if a counter-message isn't offered at the outset. Watchdogs learned this lesson the hard way over Northstar rail. By the time the opposition coalesced, it was too late.

Of course, eternal vigilance is the price of freedom. This issue, like the Vikings, could reemerge at any time. The battle was won today, but the war is far from over. Congratulations again to CCNM!

In fact, the Metropolitan Airports Commission (MAC) will be holding a meeting to receive public input with respect to the airport's future as defined by Blaine's Long Term Comprehensive Plan. Watchdogs should attend this meeting and continue to make their voice heard.

Date: June 24

Time: 5 PM

Place: Blaine City Hall

2. Golf Links Lunacy?

The Blaine Banner (one of our favorites) reported recently that the Blaine Economic Development Authority (EDA) is considering spending upwards of \$215,000 taxpayer dollars to subsidize the 3M Championship Golf Tournament. The subsidy came under scrutiny when a previous Banner article reported that Blaine EDA officials couldn't name a single business that has relocated or expanded in Blaine because of the subsidy. The entire rationale of subsidy, dubious as it is, are the alleged benefits the city derives from an ability to rub elbows with business titans who may be receptive to a pitch that Blaine is a great place to do business. Apparently the city has no mechanism to track the return on investment of taxpayer funds.

Stay tuned...

3. Coon Rapids community center draws concern.

Watchdogs are a smart group and learn their lessons well. After witnessing the success of the Blaine Airport group, the Watchdog has learned that a group of concerned citizens is organizing in Coon Rapids to monitor the proposed community center. A site has already been chosen, although the Council has emphasized that no decision to build on the site has been made.

The Watchdog will be sure to publicize details of the group as they become available.

4. Has New Brighton cut to the bone?

Last week, the Dog examined Mounds View's budget and found hundreds of thousands of dollars in non-essential expenses the city could do without, especially in this economic environment.

This week, the Dog examines the New Brighton city budget with a reformer's eye and a sharp pencil. For many weeks, cities large and small across the state have been complaining that any reduction in state aid would visit devastating cuts to budgets already pared "to the bone."

Not surprisingly, the Dog uncovered a budget in New Brighton that looks more like Star Jones before the gastric bypass than Star Jones after the bypass.

It is interesting to note that the 2009 budget was adopted by the council in December 2008, a time when the financial crisis was clearly known to every citizen, including elected officials. That the city would approve non-essential spending or increase arguably essential spending by large percentages gets to the very heart of the debate. While cities undoubtedly have taken steps to cut back spending, much more remains to be done, primarily for two reasons. First, very few citizens bother to closely examine how their city spends money. When these few are up against public employee unions and other special interests, it is usually the special interests that are more successful in pressuring city councils. Second, Minnesota's generous state aid program, known as "LGA (Local Government Aid)", decouples spending decisions from taxing decisions. In other words, since cities don't tax for LGA, their decisions to spend LGA often entail far less restraint than would otherwise be present. It's "free" money.

Parks, Recreation, and other funsies.

Of course, the first place to look for money is enterprises that are non-essential. The primary purpose of city government is to provide police, fire, and infrastructure services (e.g. sewers and streets).

Like some other cities, New Brighton owns and operates a golf course. Modern human history has amply demonstrated that the private sector can provide golfing opportunities. On page 52 of the budget, the city declares that Brightwood Hills is an

enterprise operation and that "Similar to a private business, the annual profits and losses are the responsibility of the golf course fund and tax dollars are not used to subsidize the service." Yet on page 14 of the budget, there is a transfer out of the general fund in the amount of \$390,000 for debt service for the golf course. In fact, the line item is called "Golf - subsidy for debt service."

Cost: \$390,000.

Recreation Programs.

Page 19 of the budget notes that recreation programs require a 40% taxpayer subsidy from the taxpayers. While fingerpainting and yoga classes have value, it must be asked why taxpayers should pay property taxes to subsidize someone else's leisure activities.

Cost of subsidy: \$274,640.

Family Service Center (FSC).

The FSC is New Brighton's community center. Like recreation programs, the FSC operating budget requires a 40% taxpayer subsidy, according to the 2009 budget narrative. The FSC annually hosts 1,000 birthday parties, 800 business meetings, 185 receptions and social events and over 200 community meetings. First, the private sector offers these services, thereby putting the government in direct competition with taxpaying enterprises. Second, at the minimum, the folks who have meetings and events at the FSC should be required to pay fees sufficient to cover the benefits received. In other words, the taxpayers of New Brighton shouldn't be forced to subsidize someone's business meeting or birthday bash.

Cost of subsidy: \$442,520.

Wages.

Despite the financial crisis, the city adopted the budget that included wage increases, some rather significant. For example, the FSC "regular wages" line item shows a 13.67% increase over 2008. Likewise, the Administration department's "regular wages" line item shows a 6.5% increase over 2008. All told, the city agreed to \$254,041 in wage increases for departments that are funded in whole or in part by the general fund.

Cost: \$254,041.

Overtime.

One of the first item any business cuts in a downturn is overtime authorization. Granted, a city has certain overtime exigencies that must be met to fulfill core functions. For example, a hostage situation must be resolved by law enforcement regardless of when it happens. Streets need to be plowed in a timely fashion regardless of the snowfall total. But many departments received overtime funds and even received increases in OT authorization that fulfill core functions. For example, the Finance department received a 54% increase in overtime authorization. The Parks department is authorized to spend nearly \$10,000 in overtime in 2009. Clearly, overtime of this type can be controlled by the city. Excluding essential functions, New Brighton authorized \$32,300 in OT.

Cost: \$32,300.

Memberships.

The Watchdog has long taken issue with the vast majority of memberships cities hold, both collectively and for the personal benefit of certain employees. An example of a collective membership is a membership the local chamber of commerce. Another type of collective membership is one in which the city pays dues to an organization that exists to lobby other levels of government for more taxpayer money. An example of this type of membership is the North Metro Mayors Association. An example of an individual membership is a membership in the International City/County Management Association, which accrues mainly to the benefit of the city manager. As you may have guessed, New Brighton has a membership in all three organizations.

Most of the memberships are carried in the Administration department budget. In 2009, these membership cost taxpayers \$132,700.

Cost: \$132,700.

Travel, Training, Meals.

Like overtime, travel and training budgets are the among the first budget items to be trimmed when a business experiences financial difficulties. Apparently that isn't the case with government. While there may be legitimate and necessary travel and training needs, the Watchdog has learned through experience that many "training" opportunities are little more than junkets to far off locations that do not result in the type of specific, particularized training that results in a tangible benefit such as a licensure or specific professional designation. While New Brighton's budget does not offer any narrative details, the odds are plenty good that junkets are a big part of the mix.

Cost to taxpayers: \$86,700.

Computers.

Government just loves to have the latest and greatest computer technology. Last week, we uncovered a budget request for Mounds View to upgrade to Microsoft Vista. New Brighton, not surprisingly, has computer line items as well, including 10 new PCs and some new printers.

Cost to taxpayers; \$16,000.

Vehicles.

Does the police department really need a Dodge Magnum RT? Does the community service officer need a full size SUV? Must they be purchased this year?

Cost to taxpayers: \$64,600.

Fees scam.

An interesting post scrip to the New Brighton saga is the city's cheerful admission that it is using license fees to subsidize general fund operations. Page 10 of the budget report notes, "The City's License Bureau revenues exceed its operating costs. This net contribution provides an alternative revenue source to the overall General Fund budget."

While people may disagree over the semantics between a "fee" and a "tax", there is clearly a distinction here. The fees in question come from licenses to engage in specific activities, such as hunting and fishing licenses. The fees paid should be no more than necessary to cover the cost of the service provided. That people who hunt and fish, for example, are being overcharged in order to subsidize city government should be a source of shame, not pride.

If New Brighton feels more revenues are needed for the general fund, it should have the courage to be upfront and get the money through its property tax levy and not hit licensees with a backdoor tax.

There is no doubt that the City of New Brighton could eliminate its \$400,000 budget shortfall by exercising some fiscal restraint and focusing on core functions.

E-mail Update 6/19/09

In This Issue:

1. Anoka County spends big on lobbyists (again!).
2. Watchdog exclusive! Anoka County under-reports its expenses to Auditor!
3. Speaking of lobbyists...
4. Exposing the local DFL (again).

Editor's Note: Don't forget to sign up for daily news updates from the Watchdog! Visit www.theminnesotawatchdog.com to sign up the Morning Blotter!

1. Anoka County spends big on lobbyists (again!).

Here they go again. The state Auditor's Office has released its 2008 report regarding lobbying expenses by local units of government - with disgusting and shocking results. In 2008, local units of government spent over \$8.5 million of your tax dollars to lobby the state for more of your tax dollars. The amount spent represents a 9.4% increase over what was spent in 2007, proving that government believes itself immune from the real world and the real economy.

Of course, Anoka County has once again taken its place at the head of the shame parade, spending more money on lobbying than every other local unit of government except three (Minneapolis, Hennepin County, and Saint Paul). Perhaps Hennepin County Watchdog Jeff Johnson can do something on the other side of the river.

Anoka County reported spending over \$187,000 on lobbying in 2008. But is that the real number? The state auditor's report is presented in a way that doesn't tell the whole story regarding what Anoka County taxpayers are forced to fund regarding lobbying. Here's the real story.

Count every county agency.

News reports only examined Anoka County while ignoring the reported expenses of two other agencies funded with Anoka County property tax dollars - the Anoka County Railroad Authority (ACRA) and the Northstar Corridor Development Authority (NCDA).

Lobbying expenses reported by each organization:

Anoka County: \$187,083

ACRA: \$71,454

NCDA: \$30,000

Total: \$289,257

These lobbying expenses include salaries for not only employee-lobbyists but contract lobbyists (AKA "hired guns") as well. In fact, Anoka County is only one of 9 units of local government that hires both types of lobbyists.

The other expense to keep in mind is the money that is spent by government to belong to organizations that also lobby the state. For example, its not only lobbying firms that

lobby for Anoka County. The County also belongs to organizations like the Association of Minnesota Counties that has its own lobbying staff.

Here is a breakdown of dues payments for Anoka County in 2008:

Association of MN Counties: \$41,736
Metropolitan Inter-County Association: \$83,473
North Metro Crossing Coalition: \$7,000
North Metro HWY 10 Coalition: \$30,000
Total: \$162,209

As you can see, taxpayers in Anoka County are paying a bill much larger than the \$187,000 reported by the media.

Keep this in mind when the county trots out the "cut to the bone" claims and other sob stories regarding the governor's modest reductions in state aid payments.

2. Watchdog exclusive! Anoka County under-reports its expenses to Auditor! The state Auditor prepares its annual lobbying expense report based on data submitted by each local unit of government. Thus, the system is an "honor" system even though regulated by state law.

In a Watchdog exclusive, it appears that Anoka County broke state law by failing to report some lobbying expenses as required.

Anoka County only claimed in its data submission that employee Lona Schreiber was paid to lobby in 2008. Immediately, the Watchdog smelled a problem and cross-referenced the County's submission with the lobbying reports that every lobbyist is required to submit to the state's Campaign Finance Board.

Sure enough, Anoka County employee Steve Novak had submitted lobbying reports covering all of calendar year 2008. Both reports, signed by Novak under penalty of law, claim that he:

1. Was a registered lobbyist in 2008;
2. He represented Anoka County as a lobbyist that year;
3. That he was paid by the County for lobbying that year;
4. And that he spent money to lobby on behalf of the County.

Editor's Note: It proved impossible to hyperlink to Novak's 2008 reports. To see the reports, go the Board's homepage, select "lobbyists" at the top, select "view reports," select "2008," select "N," then select "Steven G. Novak."

So who's got it right? The County or Novak? We'll let both the Auditor and the Campaign Finance Board sort it out.

3. Speaking of Lobbyists...

A Watchdog source within the County reports that employee-lobbyist Lona Schreiber has announced her retirement effective this month. Look for former state Representative Kathy Tingelstad (who ditched elective office after her veto override vote) to get the job. The County has been parking Tingelstad in the Public Health office lately. As reported by the Watchdog in March, the County has been looking for a way to get Tingelstad on the lobby team for some time. If it comes to fruition, the County will have the crack team of Steve Novak and Kathy Tingelstad lobbying on your behalf.

4. Exposing the local DFL (again).

For some time, the Watchdog has been tracking DFL activists who write letters to the editor (LTEs) in local newspapers blasting Republicans but refuse to disclose their partisanship in hopes of misleading readers into believing that these are just average citizens who are mad at their Republican elected officials.

The Watchdog has also pleaded with ABC newspapers to engage in at least the appearance of journalism and do some fact checking on these people. If the Watchdog staff can do it, so can ABC - provided they really want to do so.

The latest offense is found in last week's Anoka County Union LTEs. Bill Usher of Ham Lake penned a particularly vapid screed against state Senator Debbie Johnson. What Mr. Usher and the Union failed to note is that Usher is an officer in the local DFL. In fact, Usher is the chairman of the organization.

We guess the local DFL will engage in sham letter writing just as long as the Anoka County Union will let them get away with it.

What's really laughable is that Usher criticizes Senator Johnson for not introducing enough bills this session.

Let the Watchdog hazard a guess: Senator Johnson has won election three times to the state Senate precisely because she believes in smaller government and so do her constituents.

What's wrong, Bill? 2,171 bills aren't enough for you?

E-mail Update 6/26/09

In This Issue:

1. Anoka County's "fiscal restraint."
2. Check Anoka County salaries.
3. City Watch.

1. Anoka County's "fiscal restraint."

Here we go again. The Star Tribune last week ran an article dutifully noting Anoka County's courageous job cuts in light of the ongoing recession.

It was reported that 36 positions will be cut, with some of the cuts coming in the areas of corrections and licensing centers.

Ah, the old Washington Monument strategy. Make painful and visible cuts while keeping the positions that serve the Good Ol' Boys.

Public safety is a core function of government. That the County is cutting its compliment of probation officers in half should cause alarm for Anoka County residents. Of course, the article never answered the question of how the County would safely supervise thugs on probation with only two probation officers.

Second, there can be no doubt that those who visit license centers to obtain government-mandated documents will suffer longer waits and then be told that a failure to raise taxes is the culprit. In its infinite wisdom, the County has decided to close license centers on Saturdays. Maybe it's because their politicians, but it looks like they don't realize that Saturdays are one of only two days during the week when taxpayers can afford to stand in line.

Being a public policy web site devoted to real solutions, the Anoka County Watchdog offers the following ideas for budget cutting, no matter how painful for the Good Ol' Boys:

- Eliminate Steve Novak's position. That would save taxpayers \$128,513 a year.
- Lobbyist Lona Schreiber is retiring. Leave the position vacant and put her salary of nearly \$100,000 towards keeping probation officers.
- Clip Dan Erhart's government credit card.
- Eliminate the Public Information Officer position.
- Stop printing the County newsletter. It's just a campaign piece for commissioners anyway.
- Cut commissioner salaries. \$60,000 for a part-time job? That's the problem with government right there.

Anoka County is out of control.

2. Check Anoka County salaries.

No, we're not done with the Anoka County horror stories. A review of Anoka County employee salaries reveals that County has numerous highly paid employees who make far more than the average Anoka County taxpayer.

Are you sitting? There are some 40 County employees who are paid more than \$100,000 per year, while many others are paid nearly that much each year. Combined with a gold-plated retirement package and other Cadillac benefits, it's easy to see why government is running out of money.

It is truly amazing to watch certain sectors of the economy collapse under the weight of increasingly unsustainable labor costs.

First it was the airlines. Then it was the auto industry. It appears government is next, although the difference is that government can tap the taxpayers for an infusion of cash at any time. Come to think of it, the auto industry can do that as well, thanks to the White House.

The Star Tribune web site has an excellent interactive "information center" that tracks public employee pay data. Check it out.

3. City Watch.

"City Watch" is a collaborative effort between the Anoka County Watchdog and the Minnesota Watchdog to identify non-essential and wasteful spending by local units of government.

The latest entrant into our Hall of Shame is Coon Rapids. The city council next week will decide, during the worst economy since the Great Depression, whether or not to spend over \$3 MILLION for detailed plans for a community center.

The whole community center mania is such a bunch of bunk

First, these community centers inevitably lose money and require subsidies. In the past two weeks, the Watchdog has examined the finances of both Mounds View and New Brighton and discovered that both community centers in those locations require massive subsidies. The Coon Rapids community center would be no different.

Second, is there a lack of amenities in the area? Coon Rapids is home to both a Lifetime Fitness Center and a YMCA. A community center would put government in direct competition with the private sector.

Third, the city claims a community center is needed to keep young families in the city. No evidence has been offered to support this assertion. Frankly, it makes no sense. It's unlikely families will move out of Coon Rapids because there is no community

center. As mentioned, the city already offers what the community center proposes to offer.

Fourth, it is claimed a community center will revitalize the Coon Rapids Boulevard area. Again, there is no proof businesses will flock to the street because of a community center. Coon Rapids Boulevard has lost business because traffic volume, a key to retail success, has faded as traffic moves to HWY 10. A community center won't generate nearly enough traffic to make the area attractive once again to high-end retail.

Finally, the community center is extremely expensive. With a price tag of \$60 million, many taxpayers would argue that the money would be better spent on core government functions or not spent by government at all.

What's really funny is that the city council heard taxpayer complaints that the proposed center's \$60 million price tag was too much. In an act of remarkable governmental compassion, the price tag was reduced to \$56 million. Wow. Thanks.

E-mail Update 7/3/09

In This Issue:

1. Business Climate - Guest Column.
2. Community Center Update.
3. Taxpayer's League Scorecard Released.

1. Business Climate - Guest Column.

Twin Cities North Chamber of Commerce President Tim Roche has written the following column regarding economic recovery in Minnesota. The Anoka County Watchdog is pleased to print his column as we encourage watchdogs across the county to submit their thoughts. Those that make the grade will be featured in our weekly update.

It's especially refreshing to see a chamber of commerce actually taking a stand in favor of business. Over the past weeks, the Watchdog has shown how many chambers are captured by a large number of public and non-profit members who have a vested interest in higher taxes and more government spending.

Editor's Note: We won't hold our collective breath waiting for MetroNorth Chamber executive director Tom Snell to submit a piece in favor of limited government!

REVIVE AN ECONOMY... THE ANSWER LIES WITH THE PRIVATE SECTOR

The best road to economic recovery strengthens and grows private business. The private sector, guided by the discipline of the market system, will always be the most efficient way to create the right number of productive jobs providing the products and services the economy demands. "There is no choice" states Pat Whelan, Owner of PJW Automotive; "Private sector businesses need to find a way to be profitable each and every year. There is no other funding or millions of dollars to fall back on."

There is a great debate taking place over the airwaves and around the water coolers in Minnesota about how best to create jobs and stimulate the economy. The \$700 billion federal stimulus package is having little effect on job creation. Unemployment continues to increase and the economy continues to struggle.

So, can the government revitalize the economy by creating more public sector employment? Or will the private sector be the economic engine that turns this recession around?

When the government hires a person to dig a hole, and then hires another person to fill it in, two jobs have been created. While two public-sector employees are happy, the economic problem is that the money to pay them is taken out of the private economy through taxes and fees.

According to the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development, Minnesota's largest employer is the state of Minnesota with over 75,000 employees. The average weekly salary of these state workers is \$1,044 compared to the \$885 average weekly salary of private sector employees. The state pays for these jobs with tax money the private sector would have reinvested to grow jobs and develop new products.

Unlike the public sector, the private sector creates jobs that provide products and services people want to buy. The success of the private sector is its ability to adapt and react quickly to current situations. "Businesses need to stay nimble," Marnie Ochs-Raleigh of Evolve Systems said. "If one focus is not doing so well, we are able to shift our attention to a greater need in the market place, and continue to generate revenue."

Some businesses will lose, while other businesses will win - in good times and bad. Economists found strong cleansing effects in the marketplace during the last two U.S. recessions, 1990 and 2001. This constructive destruction process has contributed to productivity growth in the United States that is higher than the rest of the world.

The Twin Cities North Chamber of Commerce is dedicated to the growth of private business in the north metro. With over 400 member businesses in Mounds View and the surrounding area, we advocate for economic development and the opportunity to create jobs that pay great wages and offer competitive benefits to area residents.

2. Community Center Update.

The Coon Rapids City Council will make a decision next week regarding a possible \$60 million community center. Coon Rapids watchdogs will have an opportunity to make their voice heard during the council's "open mike" period. Even if you don't want to speak, your presence at the meeting will make your opinion known to the council. Democracy belongs to those who show up!

Tuesday July 7

7 PM

City Hall

11155 Robinson Drive

3. Taxpayer's League Scorecard Released.

The Taxpayer's League of Minnesota has released its scorecard from the recently concluded 2009 session. As always, the scorecard is an excellent measure of just where our legislators stand on the issue of limited government and fiscal restraint. Any politician can talk the talk, but do they walk the walk?

FRIEND OF THE TAXPAYER

Special kudos go to Rep. Tom Hackbarth (R- Cedar) for his score of 100%. Hackbarth has always been a great friend to watchdogs in his district.

We can't say there were any superstars from the Senate as both Senators Debbie Johnson (R - Ham Lake) and Mike Jungbauer (R - East Bethel) earned a paltry 50% and 64% respectively. Of course, the usual Senate suspects like Leo Foley (DFL - Coon Rapids) and Don Betzold (DFL - Fridley) earned zeroes.

On the House side, there were notable performances besides Hackbarth's. Freshman Peggy Scott (R - Andover) acquitted herself very well by posting a 93% score. Fellow frosh Tim Sanders (R - Blaine) also earned a respectable (87%). Bob Dettmer (R - Forest Lake) also put up a nice 87%.

While the Watchdog had high hopes for DFL freshman Jerry Newton (DFL - Coon Rapids), it looks like he toed the party line all the way with a big, fat goose egg.

Sometime Republican Jim Abeler continued his whimpy ways with a fence-riding 40%.

Lino Lakes Rep. Paul Gardner continued to fool his deep-red district with a reprehensible score of 7%, pulling his lifetime average down to 8%.

Denise Dittrich (DFL - Champlin) hardly bathed herself in glory with a 13%. She can do better but apparently falls in with the DFL leadership as time goes on. Where's the Rep. Dittrich who posted a 40%?

And in a major surprise, Rep. Meli\$\$a Hortman, Minnesota's "Moderate," posted a zero. Shock the world.

Until next, Watchdogs! Enjoy America's birthday!

E-mail Update 7/10/09

In This Issue:

1. Coon Rapids Community Center Power Play.
2. Anoka-Hennepin Fails to Prepare Students to Compete.

1, Coon Rapids Community Center Power Play.

Well, it looks like there are at least four people in Coon Rapids who are divorced from economic reality. Four people who are either so ignorant or so arrogant they think the city is above the economic crisis that has caused millions of job losses and shows no sign of abating.

The bad news for people who live in Coon Rapids is that these four folks comprise a majority of your city council. Yes, it appears that your city council has no charted a course to cram a \$55 million community center down taxpayers' throats.

On a 4-3 vote, the council got the ball rolling at a July 7 meeting by agreeing to spend \$545,887 to begin design work.

Council members Tim Howe, Bruce Sanders, Joe Sidoti, and Denise Klint voted "yes." Voting no were Scott Schulte, Melissa Johnson, and Paul Johnson.

Scott Schulte is deserving of particular praise for his common sense, taxpayer-first assessment of the situation.

This entire boondoggle can be summed up by Schulte's astute observation, "The ultimate question is, `Do we need a community center or don't we? No we don't need a community center.'" Indeed!

In one fell swoop, four citizens who happen to sit on the city council have committed the taxpayers to not only the half-million initial layout, but the \$54 million capital costs, the interest on the debt to finance \$54 million, but also the ongoing subsidies for operating costs going well into the future. All in the worst economy since the 1930s.

Now don't think for one minute that this boondoggle won't happen. Don't buy for one moment the excuse that the \$545,887 still leaves the option of bailing out. BS! With \$54 million in public pork waiting, the special interests are already circling overhead, eager to feast on the bloated carcass. Every day, these special interests will be working to get their hands on the money while most taxpayers sit in the dark. By the time most realize the scam, it will be too late. We'll hear all sorts of excuses that "we can't turn back," "we've invested so much," and "It's about the future." If Watchdogs don't get involved and stay involved, we're cooked. If Watchdogs want an outcome similar to the successes we've experienced with the Vikings stadium and the Blaine airport expansion, it will require the same grassroots effort and patriot's spirit. The good news is that it CAN be done. Rest assured the Watchdog stands ready to assist in this effort.

Think about what's at stake here and just how foolish the plan really is. \$55 million dwarfs the city's general fund spending and, of course, will obligate taxpayers to interest payments for decades on the debt.

Moreover, the community center will no doubt need operating subsidies as far as the eye can see. The Watchdog has exposed the community centers in New Brighton and Mounds View as two that require massive subsidies each and every year.

In a rather bizarre statement, city manager Matt Fulton explained that the revenues and expenditures "pretty much net out." Really? With annual operating expenses estimated at \$2.9 million and annual revenues estimated at \$2 million, it looks like \$900,000 in the red every year. That's not even close. Make no mistake, this palace will increase property taxes!

Again, councilman Scott Schulte offered an excellent observation. Essentially Schulte observed that both the Anoka-Hennepin school district and Anoka County will also be seeking property tax increases in the future. "They will be coming for more money, too. Not just us."

And for what public purpose? A fitness center? Local, private businesses already provide that. Meeting space? City hall and the libraries offer that amenity. Oh, yeah. Caribou offers that as well.

City officials also note that this proposed mega-building will anchor a revitalization of Coon Rapids Boulevard. City officials need to explain to just how a \$55 million government building will cause businesses to want to choose Coon Rapids Boulevard over the Highway 10 corridor, for example.

The free market has already spoken and most businesses on the Boulevard have moved on. While a measure of government assistance may be worthwhile to revitalize the area, a \$55 million aerobics palace is a poor course of action. How about \$55 million in tax incentives? If the city is hell-bent on spending the money, encourage the private sector to locate in the area and bring quality, high-paying jobs with them. Zamboni drivers and aerobics instructors don't fit the bill.

Get involved, Watchdogs!

Contact Coon Rapids here.

2. Anoka-Hennepin Fails to Prepare Students to Compete.

The latest standardized reading and math scores from the Anoka-Hennepin school district have been released and the results, as usual, aren't pretty. Despite the Coon Rapids Herald headline blaring a message that the district beat state averages, the results are far from celebration material.

Take 11th grade math tests. In the new global economy, math and science skills are paramount. The nations that best harness the innovations and breakthroughs in the high tech sector will prosper and grow. Conversely, the nations that fail to prepare their children for the rigors of this type of economy will languish. America can rely on imported high tech human capital for only so long. We must start increasing our home-grown math and science talent.

So how in Anoka-Hennepin faring in that regard?

Math proficiency for each high school:

Andover: 53%

Blaine: 34%

Champlin Park: 40%

Coon Rapids: 36%

We won't even include that appalling 2% pass rate at Crossroads Alternative HS.

That equates to a rough average of a 40% pass rate on 11th grade math for the district. In other words, 6 out of 10 11th graders aren't even proficient in math. That's simply appalling and unacceptable.

E-mail Update 7/17/09

In This Issue:

1. Community Center Update: The Dog was Right!
2. Bonding Hall of Shame.
3. City Watch: Red Wing.

Community Center Update: The Dog was Right!

The good news is that the Dog is your trusted and accurate source for everything happening in Anoka County. The bad news is that we are always right, even on the bad news.

Such is the case with the Coon Rapids Community Center. Just last week, the Dog warned taxpayers that the city was moving forward on the community center at a much faster pace than what has been represented. The Dog warned that the recent approval of funds for pre-design work by no means meant that the project was only in its infancy.

This week, we have incontrovertible proof that things are indeed moving forward.

In a Watchdog exclusive, we can report that the city is pursuing a \$10 million bonding request from the state towards the building of the community center. In other words, it's full steam ahead on the community center.

In a detailed three-page narrative, the city goes into great detail explaining the mega-project. For example, the city calls the project one of "regional" significance. As if people will hike down from Big Lake for aerobics.

The narrative also notes an association with the adjacent Anoka Ramsey Community College, noting that the community center has been incorporated into the college's long-term land use plan.

In addition to a swimming pool and ice arena, the community center will also serve as a "cultural center" for new residents. Yes, folks moving coming in from Blaine will certainly need to be assimilated into the Coon Rapids culture.

Another laugh is the narrative's assertion that the community center is a "critical component" of an effort to economically revive the region. The narrative focuses heavily on the "regional" component in an effort to secure state dollars. State bonding dollars are not used to fund strictly local projects. Hence, the asinine arguments that a swimming pool and ice arena complex is of regional importance.

Want one more laugh? The narrative argues that Coon Rapids Boulevard is a critical transportation corridor. Heck, it isn't even as vital to Coon Rapids itself as the Highway 10 corridor.

Watchdogs, we called this one. The city is far ahead in pushing for this project. If you don't want to end up saddled with higher property taxes for this white elephant, you better get active!

Read the narrative here.

On a related note, an observant Watchdog sent an email noting that Coon Rapids City Manager Matt Fulton used to be with New Brighton, a city that has long experience with a money-losing community center. Moreover, Fulton was involved with the Disastrous Northwest Quadrant development project, which is second only to Ramsey's Town Center project in terms of the biggest boondoggle.

Bonding Hall of Shame.

In addition to the Coon Rapids community center, a number of local units of Minnesota government submitted requests for bonding projects for upcoming legislative session that will kick off in February. It is important to remember two things about these bonding projects. First, bonding projects are financed by debt that must be paid back with interest. In other words, these are things that will be put on the state's credit card to be repaid by not only ourselves, but our children and grandchildren. Second, this continues to be a very difficult economy, with high unemployment and prospect of a jobless recovery (whenever that happens).

So what have our elected officials chosen as priorities during these tough times? Here's a partial list:

Bemidji: walking trail bridge (\$1,000,000)
Big Lake: ice arena (\$1,000,000)
Carlton County: community "services" center (\$4,800,000)
Chisholm: recreation center (\$350,000)
Dassel-Cokato School District (\$1,261,000)
Dodge County: walking trail (\$2,704,000)
Duluth: children's museum (\$2,750,000)
Eveleth: Hampton Inn improvements (\$650,000)
Fergus Falls: community arena (\$4,300,000)
Granite Falls: walking bridge (\$512,000)
Hennepin County: African American Cultural Center (\$840,000)
International Falls: heritage center (\$5,672,000)
Inver Grove Heights: Heritage Village Park: (\$1,313,000)
Mankato: Civic Center expansion: (\$13,900,000)
Marshall: regional sports center: (\$4,000,000)
Minneapolis: Orchestra Hall (\$22,000,000)
Minneapolis: Target Center improvements (\$4,000,000)
Duluth Tourist Train (\$13,000,000)
Mountain Iron: Arrowhead Athletic Complex: (\$5,580,000)
Nashwauk: community building (\$500,000)

New Hope: ice arena: (\$712,000)
Ramsey County: winter recreation area (\$1,500,000)
Rochester: civic center expansion: (\$34,000,000)
Sargeant: community center (\$100,000)
St. Cloud: civic center expansion: (\$15,100,000)
St. Paul: Ordway expansion (\$17,500,000)
St. Paul: Asian Pacific Cultural Center (\$9,750,000)
St. Paul: Saints ballpark (\$25,000,000)
Two Harbors: campground expansion (\$2,000,000)

And that's just a sampling. For shame.
Read more here.

City Watch: Red Wing.

The Watchdog is fully committed to calling out cities that whine and complain over state aid cuts while approving bloated budgets.

The City of Red Wing is deserving of special opprobrium for their chicken little alarmism that aid cuts will hamper the city's ability to respond to a nuclear incident at Prairie Island.

Let's take a look at the city's budget and see what kind of basic needs the city is funding:

Swimming pool: \$340,000

Flower baskets: \$40,000

Golf course: \$204,850

Community communications: \$411,685

If the core governmental obligation of public safety is lacking, here's nearly \$1 million available to cover the gap.

Red Wing should also be singled out as a city that even has a web page devoted to bitching about aid cuts.

Grow up, Red Wing.

E-mail Update 7/24/09

In This Issue:

SPECIAL EDITION: Coon Rapids Community Center Action Update!

Editor's Note: Watchdog founder and CEO Harold Hamilton has directed that the Coon Rapids Community Center issue be given the highest priority. Every Watchdog across the network should be concerned about the community center. The city is seeking both state and county dollars for this project and probably even some federal funds we don't know about. **IT'S YOUR MONEY! Get involved!**

Getting Information.

Kristopher Olson has formed the local action group that will take the lead on this issue.
kris@tkodistributing.com
612-205-2280

Web site: www.letusvotecr.org. Editor's Note: As of 7:15 am today, the site did not appear to be operational. We trust it will be up and running soon.

A Plan of Action.

Olson's group is seeking a citizen petition to force a vote on the community center issue. The petition hopes to collect the needed 7,496 valid signatures required. Here is the tentative schedule for the petition drive:

August 2nd Petition Kick-Off Party (location to be announced).

August 4th to 9th Petition Ward 2

August 10th to 16th Petition Ward 5

August 17th to 23rd Petition Ward 4

August 24th to 30th Petition Ward 1

August 31st to Sep 6th Petition Ward 3

Sep 7th to 11th wrap up

Other Important Dates.

Saturday, July 25th. Kristopher Olson will be on the Sue Jeffers Show to speak about the community center. He is scheduled to be on about 5:45 PM. The show is on FM 100.3.

Wednesday, July 29th. From 6:30 - 8:30 PM Coon Rapids will be hosting "Summer in the City" at Woodview Park (11540 Olive Street). City officials will be on hand and it is vital that Watchdogs be seen at this event. Poor attendance sends the message that our group is weak and unmotivated.

Words of Wisdom.

An 89 year-old Watchdog passed along a copy of her letter to the City Council on this matter. This person also identifies herself as a proud Democrat and retired government employee.

LETTER FOLLOWS BELOW:

"As a resident of CR for over 52 yrs (More than any member of my council?) and having closely followed my city govt's actions, I feel qualified to expound on the subject of the multi-million dollar city center being proposed. This same letter is being sent to all members of my council including the 3 "anti" members (Whom I admire for their "guts".)

1--Where has good old common sense gone"? I was taught -- "No mon, no fun".

2--You council members were elected to represent the people. Now LISTEN TO THE PEOPLE! If you doubt their wishes, let them vote and then decide.

3--I'm amazed at the audacity you have to spend multi-million dollars of other peoples' money when many of them have no jobs, no homes, families to support, a dismal future. Do you sleep well at night?

4--Is there no government leader left to protect our pocketbooks?

5--With 2 schools closing, families leaving, dozens of empty businesses closed and possibly more fitness ctrs. because of competition from their city govt., a gloomy outlook for CR Blvd., where's the future influx of future participants in a laviish city center you predict?

6-- In such precarious economic times, isn't it time to "Bite the bullet" and stop spending??

7--Everyone is tired of the "We-know-what's-better-for-you-than-you-do" attitude so often displayed in all levels of government. PLEASE, can't we be different?!

8--Finally, I know each of you work hard and are sincere in your efforts to better our city. For this, thank you -- however, it may be time to back pedal and re-think your thoughts. --Thanks for listening.
Amen!

Thoughts from Kristopher Olson.

Mr. Olson has also been distributing a "fact sheet" he has put together regarding the community center. Also, don't forget to visit

http://www.anokacountywatchdog.com/email/email_updates.html to read our most recent email updates on the community center to get Harold Hamilton's insights on the folly of building a \$55 million white elephant.

1. Government should not be involved in private business.

This is a fundamental role of government that is not needed. Anything the government can do, private industry can accomplish. If you're OK today with a Community Center then tomorrow will it be OK for them to start a Construction Company, Insurance Company, and Fast Food Restaurants. Beware of the tag "community center", this is nothing more than a government operated gym, no different than the YMCA or Lifetime Fitness.

2. We do not need the CRRRC project to stimulate the economy on Coon Rapids Blvd Coon Rapids BLVD with the proper support could flourish even in this economy. We could work with Anoka County to have the road redone and create curb appeal that would draw private business to the area. We could then give tax credits to help small business in the area. Rezone some land residential to help boost population and activity in the area. Rezone areas to allow for more office structures will increase space for medical buildings near Mercy.

There is nothing to support that building a community center will stimulate the economy or create an environment that will draw other businesses. A community center does not change the surroundings. This is still an unpleasant community. You will simply have a community center in an area that nobody wants to go to.

3. We need to draw young families to Coon Rapids

This city operated community center will not provide 1 amenity that doesn't already exist in our area. Just because it isn't in Coon Rapids means nothing. We have school activities for children, a community center in Andover, Maple Grove, and Shoreview. The Coon Rapids YMCA is a non-profit organization dedicated to youth and community programs. We have the super rinks in Blaine that can handle any needs related to hockey. We have a senior center at City Hall built just a few years ago. They are proposing nothing that isn't currently available to the public. If people wouldn't choose Coon Rapids for those amenities then they won't do so for a city operated community center.

There is no fundamental reasoning that building a community center would draw people to any community. Low taxes, affordable homes, and schools are what people look for in purchasing homes.

4. Cook Arena is 40 years old and needs to be replaced
\$25 million dollars is ridiculous.

5. Anoka School District 11 is closing schools because school enrollment is down and we need to provide programs for children

This is very much true. They have not made a decision on what schools will close and because Coon Rapids has 1/3 of the Elementary Schools it is likely that one of ours will close.

Population's eb and flow like the stock market. Area's get older and have less children in the area, then the area cycles out and young families move back in as homes become available. Our community is filled with long time loyal residents who want to retire in the city they grew up in. Eventually the area will shift and we will need to service the increase population of children. Does it seem logical that a community center can change this dynamic. On August 24th the task force will give their recommendation to the School District on how to proceed.

6. Cost

The proposal submitted in January was \$60 million dollars and was projected to have a \$210.96 (11% increase) per year increase on property taxes for a \$233,000 home. That estimate came down to \$132.00 (7% increase) at a July work shop. Then at the July 7th City Council meeting they lowered it again to \$117 or \$70 a year if they can get 10 million dollars in State Bonding. So if the State of Minnesota does not approve the 10 million in bonding then the price tag goes back to \$117. They are also relying on moving current TIF money in Coon Rapids and they are estimating construction costs to be 10% lower than originally projected. If they do not get approval for the TIF money and there estimate is off on construction bids then the price goes back up to the \$132.00 a year.

The % of tax increase is based off our total property taxes, which includes County, City, State, School, and Special taxes. A \$70 a year increase may only be a night out or a trip to a ball game but a \$70 tax increase on a \$220,000 home would be an estimated 11% tax increase on your city tax rate. This may be a small overall number but it still is a large % increase in taxes.

7. Loss of tax revenue

The land being used for this project was to be purchased by private business. This private business would have created jobs and would be generating tax revenue for the city if they hadn't made an over bid of 5 million dollars to purchase the land. In doing this the City of Coon Rapids single handedly hindered the free market system and stifled economic recovery.

8. TROLLEY

Is this our vision in Coon Rapids? A trolley that runs up from Northtown Mall to Anoka along Coon Rapids Blvd connection the CRRRC, ARCC, and Mercy. Coon Rapids is not Minneapolis/St.Paul and this will only create condensed low income housing. Are there any businesses along the Hiawatha Line?? Business's wont flock to this! They will run! Commuter lines will inhibit traffic flow and be a deterrent for every day travelers. The only traffic on Coon Rapids BLVD will be trolley traffic.

E-mail Update 8/3/09

In This Issue:

The Continuing Saga.
The Watchdog in the news.
The Good Ol' Boys join the bailout business.
Community Center update.

The Continuing Saga

Written by Harold Hamilton

What was the most important event of last week? The event that reveals the most about our attitudes and our various cultural differences?

Was it the encounter between Professor Gates and Sergeant Crowley of the Cambridge Police Department? While this did consume the most attention by the media, it was not the most revealing. The most revealing was President Obama's characterization of the Cambridge Police Department as acting stupidly. This tells us the President's attitude about our police. This only confirms how President Obama feels about our country. He is not proud of America and has said as much during his foreign visits. It also confirms that the President is the nation's know-it-all. He has to wade in even when he admits that he doesn't have all the facts. Are there any issues he isn't willing to comment on?

Most of us learned at an early age that mouthing off to the police is not a good idea. Is it surprising that being uncooperative with the police can end you up in handcuffs? Most of us learned at a tender age that the police should be treated with respect as they are often putting their lives on the line.

I recently attended a retreat put on by the Economics Department of George Mason University. During a Q & A session, I asked one of the professors, "What is President Obama's motivation?" His response, "To do what he thinks is best for this country." I actually asked the wrong question. I should have asked, "What does the President believe is best for our country?" The answer is obvious based on his first six months in office. The President believes that the country should be steered toward socialism. Equality of outcome is the goal and we need bigger government to accomplish this. Income redistribution is a must to accomplish this goal.

Obviously, huge government expenditures are required to meet the goal. This results in large deficits and a huge debt. Even the Chinese are having doubts about our credit worthiness.

Vice-President Biden came up with one of his famous quotes. "We have to go spend money to keep from going bankrupt." Could any comment be more ridiculous?

Huge spending has been President Obama's recipe for ending the recession. This is classic Keynesian economics. It was prescribed by John Maynard Keynes, a famous British economist, for ending the depression in the thirties. One problem - it didn't work. The depression only ended with the advent of World War II and it's never proven to work since. So why does the federal government continue to try it? It makes politicians feel good because it gives them a reason to spend lots of money on their pet projects.

The proven method for stimulating the economy is to cut taxes and spending. It worked in the sixties for President Kennedy and has worked several times since. High taxes are pure poison for business, especially during a recession.

The Heritage Foundation perhaps puts it best. "Importantly, economic growth is not the consequence of government policies or of some master economic plan. It results from millions of people individually seeking what is in their own interests by providing what is in the interests of others, and the collective consequence of their actions is to increase the number of jobs in the economy, the wages earned by workers, and the income and wealth of the nation."

The Watchdog in the news.

The Star Tribune Last week profiled web sites that seek to keep government accountable. Of course, no profile would be complete without featuring the Anoka County Watchdog, the state's premier local government accountability web site. The Anoka County Watchdog's transparency, superior fact-supported research, cogent writing, and all-around awesomeness has done much to expose the Good Ol' Boy culture in Anoka County while achieving victories on behalf of local taxpayers.

We've been proud to stand with other local groups and individual patriots to fend off a massive tax increase to build a football stadium for Zygmunt Wif and his gang Love Boat bandits. We exposed the obscene feeding at the public trough of the Good Ol' Boys as they travel to Hawaii and dine at 5-star locations on the taxpayer dime.

But it looks like we have so much more to do.

For some reason, the Star Tribune thought it would be a good expenditure of ink to print the inane ramblings of Good Ol' Boy Godfather Dan Erhart as well. From his comments, it's clear that Erhart is angry that we're out there tracking and exposing him.

"They've done absolutely nothing in Anoka County to protect government honesty and integrity," said Erhart. "When you have people using smear tactics and incorrect information, that doesn't help anyone."

Nothing? Our victories over Erhart and his gang regarding the Vikes stadium, the Blaine Airport runway expansion, and our soon-to-be victory over the Coon Rapids Community Center are undeniable.

But Erhart is right in one respect. The Watchdog has thus far completely and utterly failed to stop Erhart from abusing the taxpayers as he flogs them mercilessly with his government-issued credit card.

But then again, asking Erhart to stop abusing the taxpayers is like asking Joan Rivers to stop getting plastic surgery.

Again, Erhart was given a free pass by the media when claimed, once again, that the Watchdog uses "smear tactics" and "incorrect information" without being required to provide examples.

The Watchdog hereby renews our standing invitation to provide examples of our inaccurate reporting. We promise to print your response at the very top of our update, Danno.

Until that time, we invite our readers to review once again review the facts regarding Erhart's face-stuffing ways.

As for running for office, Harold Hamilton will take a pass. He's too busy creating quality manufacturing jobs right here in Fridley while navigating a difficult economy and paying the high taxes imposed on our small businesses.

By the way, Dan, we hear a new batch of spending reports are being reviewed right now. We'll be sure to publish them when available.

The Good Ol' Boys join the bailout business.

As if bailout mania coming out of Washington wasn't bad enough. We have bailouts of car companies, Wall Street, and other businesses deemed "too big to fail."

Anoka County has now entered the bailout business by giving a break to Key Air, which has a rental agreement with the County at the Blaine Airport.

Specifically, Key Air will pay no rent to the County from July 1 of 2009 to July 1 of 2010. Moreover, Key Air will pay only ½ of the rent due for the period running from July 1, 2010 to July 1, 2011. This rent will be paid back, with interest, over a 20-year period beginning July 1 of 2011.

Wouldn't that be great if Anoka County gave us property tax payers a break on our property taxes? Wouldn't it be great if we didn't have to pay property taxes for a year and then got to pay it back over a 20 year period? Don't hold your breath. Deals like that are reserved strictly for Good Ol' Boys, recession or not. When you tell the County you can't pay, they send the Sheriff. When Key Air says it can't pay, the County sends a gift-wrapped bailout.

By the way, just what is the County doing in the airport business, anyway?

Community Center Update.

Good job, Watchdogs. The "Summer in the City" event brought out scores of Watchdogs who pressed elected officials regarding the proposed community center and kept the discussion focused on that topic.

The Watchdog also extends a sincere "thank you" to Sue Jeffers and her KTLK 100.3 radio program. Sue spent a great deal of time exploring the community center on her show last week.

Finally, the "let us vote" web site regarding the community center is now up and running. Check it out.

E-mail Update 8/10/09

In This Issue:

1. Party like it's 1929;
2. Party like it's 1929 - part II;
3. \$2.3 million to nag us to death.

1. Party like it's 1929.

Northstar commuter rail will begin hauling the first loads of taxpayer-subsidized riders later this year.

After seeing the line shrink by half and the costs overruns of \$150 million, what's the responsible thing to do? Throw a party, of course!

Never mind that unemployment is still high. Never mind that people continue to lose their homes. Never mind that small businesses continue to close their doors. Let them eat cake, indeed!

The Pioneer Press reported on Friday that Northstar rail bureaucrats are planning to host a \$50,000 party to congratulate themselves on a job well-done - with your money.

But you won't be invited, unless you happen to be a politician or a well-heeled lobbyist friend of a politician. The guest list is for "movers and shakers" only.

Now the bureaucrats will tell you that the taxpayers are "only" kicking \$20,000 for the shrimp cocktails and champagne. The other \$30,000 will come from private sources. But isn't that the problem? Those private sources will undoubtedly be lobbying firms and other organizations that work to get government contracts from the very same elected officials who will be hosting the wing-ding. It's a dirty game of you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours.

Moreover, the justification for blowing \$20,000 on a party is simply asinine and demonstrates just how arrogant and out of touch these people are.

Hennepin County Commissioner Peter McLaughlin, who competes with Dan Erhart to see who can abuse the taxpayer the most, says that the party is needed to thank the federal government for funding half of Northstar with money borrowed from the Chinese.

"Federal officials paid for half of Northstar; we should thank them." No, Mr. McLaughlin. The federal government didn't pay for half. The humble, abused taxpayer paid for the whole damn thing. Thank them by cutting their taxes, particularly their property taxes, which you continue to raise.

If you want to thank federal bureaucrats, send them an email. Or you could just send some hand-written thank you cards with Dan Erhart to deliver personally on one of his

many junkets to Washington (more on that later). Hennepin County saves on the stamp while Anoka County pays for the plane ride.

McLaughlin and co-conspirator Dan Erhart also claim that it's important to have this party in order to kiss up to federal officials who will make decisions about future rail pork in Minnesota.

Pardon the Watchdog's ignorance, but is that how Washington decides which rail projects to fund? By who holds the best party? By who fetes federal functionaries best? Wow, and here we thought there was a process based on applications and some modicum of merit. Perhaps we have become more of a banana republic than we realized.

While it may be argued that the amount of money involved is really no big deal, the principle of the matter is quite large and very disturbing.

Essentially, it's an expensive party for politicians to thank each other for spending money we don't have on a poorly conceived rail plan that will require massive subsidies as far as the eye can see. On top of that, it sends a message that our elected officials would rather fiddle while our financial Rome burns to the ground.

How ironic that this party will happen in November, the same month the county will tell us how much our property taxes will go up to fund their "cut to the bone" operations.

Remember in November!

Until then, you can "thank" your county commissioners here:
Anoka County
Hennepin County

2. Party like it's 1929 - part II.

Our friends at the Blaine Banner newspaper this month published the expenses of our esteemed Anoka County commissioners the period of January through June of this year.

In the worst economy since the Great Depression, the Anoka County commissioners spent \$87,000 of your money on conferences, meals, lodging, and other junket-related expenses. Let them eat cake!

Before we get to the numbers, Watchdogs, close your eyes and take a guess. Just which county commissioner do you think lead the pack in taxpayer credit card spending. Who could it possibly be?

Shock the world! (Just kidding.) Godfather Dan Erhart was the biggest abuser, leading the way with \$5,762 in expenses.

Recession or not, the Godfather has got places to go, people to see, and lobster to eat.

Commissioner Erhart has been to Washington multiple times, presumably to "thank" federal officials. Then we don't need that November train fiesta, do we?

According to the Banner article, Erhart has also seen Nashville this year. Maybe for the ribs?

What is shocking and disappointing is that Commissioner Robyn West was second to Erhart in expenses, with \$1,341 claimed. West also has visited Washington and Nashville. How very, very disappointing.

Commissioner Scott LeDoux continues to travel as well. And true to his M.O., he made to a sunny locale, visiting Fort Meyers, Florida on your dime.

Dick Lang came in fourth with \$1,296 in expenses.

Jim Kordiak, who always seems to ride the fence, was fifth with \$737 claimed.

In a pleasant surprise, Commissioner Dennis Berg claimed a very modest \$383. Watchdogs thank Berg for showing some restraint.

And the grand prize for restraint goes to a familiar face, Commissioner Rhonda Sivarajah, a true hero of the taxpayer. If our society approves of cloning anything, it ought to be Sivarajah. With seven of her on the Board, our fiscal problems would be solved!

3. \$2.3 million to nag us to death.

Oh, did we mention that the state is also in the red? Yes, you've heard all the wailing and gnashing of teeth of liberal legislators who have bemoaned Governor Pawlenty's tough fiscal love.

It looks like the Minnesota Department of Health has found \$2.3 million in the couch cushions at the Capitol.

The Department has awarded Anoka County a grant in this amount to "promote wellness." What this means is that the County will employ an army of busybodies to browbeat and nag us about eating cheeseburgers and watching too much TV.

The Watchdog calls upon all Watchdogs to protest this monumental waste of taxpayer dollars by eating a Big Mac and smoking a Camel today.

Here's some free advice for the County. Start promoting healthy eating by putting an end to this piggery.

E-mail Update 8/17/09

In This Issue:

1. Obama's Credibility;
2. Anoka-Hennepin Fails the Grade;
3. Pawlenty's Report Card;
4. Deadbeats.

OBAMA'S CREDIBILITY - By Harold Hamilton

As one who runs a manufacturing company, it's obvious that credibility with the customers is important. When we tell them something it had better be the truth or we destroy our credibility. So, it is surprising that President Obama doesn't seem to realize that not telling the truth destroys his credibility. Here are a few of his recent falsehoods:

- We have AARP on board for our health care plan. Not true according to AARP.
- With our plan, you can keep your healthcare plan and your doctor. This is true if you or your employer doesn't change plans. If you change plans, you'll be on the public plan (government healthcare).
- I am not a single payer supporter. This contradicts candidate Obama's website from last year.

Unfortunately, by failing to tell the truth, President Obama destroys his credibility. Is it any surprise that people at the town hall meetings are furious and his poll numbers are plummeting?

ANOKA-HENNEPIN FAILS THE GRADE

The federal government released the latest report card for schools under the No Child Left Behind law. Much like the recent results from the state's reading and math standardized tests, there isn't much to cheer about in this latest report.

For the second year in a row, the Anoka-Hennepin schools failed to demonstrate Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), a basket of criteria used to assess whether or not students are learning.

In all, 27 district schools failed AYP and have been labeled as "underperforming." Of those 27, 13 face sanctions because they receive federal Title I funding. Four of those schools underperformed for the second year in a row, meaning that students in those schools may transfer.

These dismal results beg a fundamental question. Just where exactly is the accountability? Who is responsible for these deficiencies and what corrective action is being undertaken? It seems all we hear about is money and how much more of it will be needed from our wallets to offer ever-higher salaries and gold-plated benefits. It is

high time that taxpayers start asking what the return on investment will be for the billions we spend to fund the monopoly of government-run schools.

Until government-run schools are subjected to the discipline of free market competition, we will continue to see what economists have observed for centuries. Namely, that monopolistic enterprises suffer from high prices, inefficiencies, and lower quality products.

PAWLENTY'S REPORT CARD

After getting faked out of their collective jocks last legislative session, DFLers have demonstrated a particular hatred towards Governor Pawlenty. Pawlenty's success, talents, and leadership stand in stark contrast to the talent offered by the DFL leadership under House Speaker Margaret Kelliher and Senator Larry Pogemiller. After being exposed as empty suits, these two in particular have led the liberal charge in spewing invective towards Pawlenty. The mainstream media is only too willing to provide a platform for charges that Pawlenty has ruined the state's economy and quality of life by mishandling the ship of state and in particular failing to raise the "revenues" that feed an ever-growing Leviathan of state spending.

So what the real story? Do the facts support the DFL and the media? Let's take a look.

The DFL frequently offers a shrill chorus of criticism against Pawlenty's budget practices, noting that he opposes tax increases but wants to spend money anyway by borrowing, a practice that is jeopardizing the state's future.

Sorry, Larry and Marge, but the organizations that rate government budget practices don't agree. In fact, Minnesota just received a clean bill of health from these three and retained stellar ratings with respect to the state's credit standing.

Moody's, Fitch, as well as Standard and Poor all gave Minnesota excellent debt ratings. In fact, these ratings were nearly perfect. Standard and Poor gave Minnesota the highest possible rating, "AAA." Fitch did the same. Moody's rated Minnesota just one notch below perfect at "Aa1."

The state's excellent budget practices were praised by Fitch, which said, "Minnesota's 'AAA' GO rating reflects the state's excellent debt structure, broad-based economy with above-average wealth levels, and track record of management that is sensitive to changes in the state's fiscal environment, with regular reviews of revenue forecasts."

That these excellent ratings were kept during the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression is nothing short of amazing. Many states have suffered massive downgrades of the creditworthiness during this timeframe, including some that have seen their debt instruments downgraded to "junk" status. The same goes for a large number of private sector organizations as well.

How about jobs? At the start, it must be recognized that presidents and governors receive far too much credit and blame for the economy. While these chief executives certainly craft policies that influence economic prosperity, every job created or lost on their watch isn't attributable directly to their stewardship.

But if Pawlenty is going to be blamed by the DFL for job losses, he certainly should get credit from them for job creation as well.

In a Watchdog exclusive, we can report that Minnesota will be receiving some very welcome news on the jobs front this week. Because the information has not yet been released to the public, we will refrain from revealing details. Just make sure to watch the news on Thursday.

In fact, Minnesota is at or near the top of numerous statistical categories.

- First in overall quality of life
- First in Fortune 500 companies per capita
- First in home ownership
- First in percentage of residents with a high school diploma
- Out of the top 10 in taxes (which happened under Pawlenty's watch)
- First in percentage of residents with a college education

Despite all the doom and gloom fostered by the DFL and their now infamous "misery tour" last winter, Minnesota is in pretty good shape compared with our 49 counterparts. It's high time the DFL stop badmouthing Minnesota in the name of attacking a governor they hate.

Minnesota has done well under Pawlenty's watch, despite the fact that he has had to deal with a DFL majority that seems fixated on the past and obsolete economic policies that were last popular in the 1970s.

Let's see the mainstream media start calling the DFL on these facts. And it's time for the DFL to stop with the PR gimmicks like their bogus "leadership summit." Talk is cheap.

DEADBEATS

We now have proof positive that DFLers are extremely generous with money - as long as it's someone else's money. The Star Tribune reported last week that many DFL elected officials owe the Party thousands and thousands in unpaid "dues" that are assessed to help keep the Party that helped elect them financially strong.

These dues, which may be paid from campaign contributions, have been slow in coming.

Senator Amy Klobuchar owes \$40,000.

Rep. Keith Ellison owes \$35,000.

Senator Al Franken owes \$25,000.

Perhaps Ellison's campaign needs the money to pay parking tickets.

While the Watchdog wouldn't shed a tear if the fund went bankrupt, this story is a classic illustration of the fiscal conservatism practiced by liberals when it comes to their money,

E-mail Update 8/24/09

In This Issue:

1. The Dittrich Record.
2. Jobs Report.
3. What is \$1,800,000,000,000?
4. Brett Favre - stadium pitch man.
5. Stossel cuts to the Chase.
Farewell Mark Brunswick.

THE DITTRICH RECORD

It appears that state Representative Denise Dittrich is just a little sensitive to charges that she is a tax-and-spend DFLer.

In this week's letters to the editor (LTE) in the Anoka County Union, Dittrich writes a rather lengthy missive defending her tax vote record in response to a previous LTE written by one of her constituents.

In the August 7th edition of the Anoka County Union, a Dittrich constituent wrote a letter to the editor in which he argued that Rep. Dittrich supported too many tax increases. (Editor's Note: to see this letter, visit the link above and scroll down.)

What makes Dittrich's response so interesting is that she notes the rationale for her response is "the need to respond to misrepresentations in the (previous) letter." However, Dittrich's letter never tells the reader what the perceived misrepresentations are and thus never responds directly to those perceived misrepresentations.

The exchange raises an interesting question regarding Dittrich's voting record. After all, she is a DFLer representing a Republican-leaning district. For example, in 2008, the district went for John McCain, Norm Coleman, and Erik Paulsen. In 2006, the district supported Pawlenty for governor as well.

So is Rep. Dittrich a moderate DFLer who does a good job representing her Republican-leaning constituents or is she a tax-and-spender masquerading as a moderate?

As always, the Dog examines these issues by consulting the Taxpayer's League of Minnesota (TLM) legislative scorecard, the gold standard of fiscal conservatism.

Dittrich was first elected in 2004, making 2005 her first year in the Minnesota House.

2005

In her first session, Dittrich garnered a respectable (for a Democrat) 42% rating from the League. However, she voted for a tax increases on tobacco, gasoline, and Minnesota-based corporations.

2006

In the final year of her first term, Dittrich again posted a decent score, earning a 44% approval rating, for a 43% average for the term.

That session, she supported more garden variety big government by, among other things, rejecting a bill that would have required Northstar rail riders to cover the full cost of operating the line as well supporting dedicating a portion of the sales tax to bike trails and the arts.

2007

After being re-elected, it seems Dittrich felt a bit more liberated with respect to tax votes. In 2007, her TLM score plunged dramatically to a mere 8% approval. Dittrich that year voted to raise income taxes as well as voting for a basket of tax increases to support mass transit. She also voted to repeal welfare reforms and increase welfare spending.

2008

This year wasn't much better for Dittrich constituents concerned about higher taxes and bigger government. That year, she improved her score from the previous year by one whole percentage point, earning a pathetic approval rating of 9%. For the term, Dittrich scored an 8.5% approval rating.

That year, she voted for the \$6.6 billion transportation tax increase and the infamous veto override of that bill. She also voted a regional cap and trade bill that would raise energy taxes on every family. It's too bad that Minnesota's support of a regional cap and tax bill never received the scrutiny that the national bill has been receiving.

2009

Unfortunately, Dittrich's precipitous drop in taxpayer friendliness continued into the 2009 session. This past session, she boosted her approval rating, but only to 13%.

During the worst economy since the Great Depression, Dittrich joined the DFL majority in voting for massive tax increases and also voted in favor of veto override of those same tax increases. While Dittrich did vote against one tax increase bill, she voted for another one and also for a veto override of that bill.

Perhaps Dittrich could write another LTE explaining why she thought a \$1 billion tax increase, including a tax increase on small businesses, was a good idea. Just why exactly is it a good idea to increase taxes on small businesses, especially when the unemployment rate is so high? Are these businesses under taxed? Does increasing their tax burden somehow encourage job growth in her mind? Is it that Dittrich believes state government shouldn't bear the "burden" of living on 96% of previous revenues? The Watchdog would be happy to post Rep. Dittrich's response.

In the final analysis, the Dittrich tax record is a tale of two extremes. On the one hand, she had a respectable freshman term. On the other, she has gone downhill fast ever

since. While only Dittrich knows the reasons, the Watchdog fears the latter voting record represents the true Rep. Dittrich. After voting carefully as a freshman in the minority, she seems to have felt liberated after being re-elected and now finding herself in the majority. We well remember a similar pattern with former Rep. Kathy Tingelstad. In any case, Dittrich's record of the past three years is not the record of a moderate legislator.

You can view TLM scorecards here (click the "scorecards" drop menu at the top of the page).

JOBS REPORT

Lat week, the Dog scooped the mainstream media and reported that the state was in for a good does of economic news, although we refrained from revealing details per the request of our Capitol sources.

This week, the details of the Dog's story were revealed. In July, Minnesota added 10,300 jobs across a broad range of economic sectors. The state's jobless rate now stands at 8.1%, well below the national average of 9.4%. In a disturbing trend, government, which doesn't create wealth, added 2,800 bureaucrats. For the year, government in Minnesota has added 6,000 bureaucrats.

Another encouraging bit of information is that 95% of employers surveyed have no plans to reduce their payrolls for the remainder of the year.

While this report doesn't mean the end of the recession, it is another positive indicator that we may be pulling out the economic tailspin.

Again, it's time for the DFL to stop with doom and gloom. The recipe for economic health is for them to offer a real plan to reduce state spending and create incentives for private sector employers to expand and locate here. Without private wealth to underpin government spending, the DFL will be hard pressed to produce on all the goodies they promise government unions.

WHAT IS \$1,800,000,000,000?

The current federal deficit is projected to be \$1.8 trillion. It is sobering indeed to remember that the ENTIRE federal budget in 2000 was less than \$1.8 trillion. In other words, our federal deficit has ballooned to swallow what the entire budget was just 9 years ago. Can you imagine a household where the debt grew that fast relative to income? President Obama is clearly in over his head and not up to the job of President of the United States.

BRETT FAVRE - STADIUM PITCH MAN.

The Vikings still don't get it. Spending \$700 million in taxpayer funds to subsidize a private, for-profit business is a tricky political proposition under the best of circumstances. It's downright foolish, however, to do it in this kind of economy.

Then again, the Vikings have a reputation for a lack of political sophistication, especially for such a well-funded operation populated with all sorts of smart, talented employees.

A Watchdog source passed along to us this week the latest update from Minnesota Momentum, a Vikings' sponsored "Astroturf" web site that's supposed to fool us into thinking that it is really a grass roots organization of regular folks who support giving Zygi a fat subsidy.

The lead item in the latest email newsletter read:

Favre Signing Spurs Fan Support

With a sudden reversal of field, the Vikings signed Quarterback Brett Favre yesterday. The signing has generated a media storm and a wave of fan support for the Vikings.

In addition to strong ticket and merchandise sales, the signing has spurred support for the Vikings' stadium development effort. Minnesota Momentum members, like you, will continue to play a crucial role in the long term future of the team. We will need your active support going forward.

Funny, the Watchdog has yet to read of one elected official in this state agreeing with that assertion. In fact, the public statements have gone the other way.

Moreover, there are media reports that the Favre signing may not have been as dramatic as was portrayed by the team. Some speculate that Favre and Vikings had an agreement worked out all along. Both parties cooked up the "sudden reversal" scenario so Favre didn't have to attend the full training camp while the team could generate a storm of media hype over the signing. If this is proven true, it would damage the team's credibility while they try to hornswaggle the legislature into funding a new stadium.

STOSSEL CUTS TO THE CHASE

While the health care reform debate can cause even the most avid policy wonk or political junkie to fall asleep under an avalanche of acronyms and numbers, every American is rightly concerned about what health care reform might mean to them.

If you don't read anything else about health care reform as proposed by Barak Obama, read this one item from John Stossel:

Medical care doesn't grow on trees. It must be produced by human and physical capital, and those resources are limited. Therefore, if demand for health care services increases -- which is Obama's point in extending health insurance -- prices must go up.

Bingo!

FAREWELL MARK BRUNSWICK

Star Tribune Capitol reporter Mark Brunswick is leaving his Capitol beat to return to headquarters in Minneapolis to assume a new beat covering military affairs. Brunswick was always a straight shooter and an honest broker of political news. The Watchdog is sorry to see Brunswick leave his post. Good luck in your new assignment!

E-mail Update 8/31/09

In This Issue:

1. Harold is Your Hook-Up.
2. Coon Rapids Shows Some Mercy.
3. Statement from Commissioner Robyn West.
4. Cash for Clunkers Pounds the Poor.
5. More Evidence Rail Isn't the Answer.
6. Centerville Group Home Controversy.

1. Harold is Your Hook-Up.

Watchdogs, you know Harold Hamilton has your back - literally. In addition to his tireless work to hold government accountable on your behalf, he's also your man during these tough economic times for some quality Watchdog swag. Our simple yet stylish t-shirts tell Anoka County that you stand for accountable, limited government. As always, the shirt is free. Harold is indeed the kind of guy who will give you the shirt off his back.

Order your shirt here.

Check out a local supermodel sporting one of our t-shirts here.

2. Coon Rapids Shows Some Mercy.

Always fair and balanced, the Watchdog never fails to give credit where credit is due, even when the doer of good happens to be a governmental organization. The Coon Rapids Herald reported this past week that the City Of Coon Rapids Council appears poised to authorize a very modest increase in the 2010 property tax levy.

The proposed levy, if adopted, would increase the amount of the 2010 levy by less than 1% of the 2009 levy. Many properties would see a tax decrease under this plan while some would see an increase, albeit the smallest increase of the three levy options presented to the Council. The other two would have increased taxes by a larger amount.

5 of the 7 Council members voiced support for the smallest levy increase option. Councilman Scott Schulte spoke vigorously in favor of the first option. Only Bruce Sanders and Denise Klint voiced support for other options. Klint voiced support for the second option while Sanders supported a levy increase that fell between options one and two. No member supported option three, the largest levy increase option.

Talk about a tale of two city councils. Can this be the same Council that is also poised to pursue a mega-community center? On this one at least, the Council is headed in the right direction.

The final levy approval will come later this year.

In other news, Oak Grove has agreed during a workshop this past week to hold its levy at 2009 levels.

3. Statement from Commissioner Robyn West.

Commissioner Robyn West offered the following statement regarding Kathy Tingelstad:

I would like to begin my comments by confirming my belief that Kathy Tinglestad is a good and capable woman who has given many years of service to Anoka County already. She is hard working and will continue to give good service to the citizens of Anoka County. When I began my quest to run for elected office she was there to support me and encourage me. She kept in contact and gave me advice along the way. I very much appreciate and respect her for that.

I have talked to her about what I have to say today. My comments are not directed to Kathy, nor are they about her. I am addressing the process that was used to make the selection for this position of Intergovernmental Coordinator.

For over a year I have known it was the intent of some to place Kathy in the position that Lona Shreiber has recently retired from. Early on I mentioned to a couple in administration and other commissioners that I thought it would be more appropriate and transparent to post the job and interview for it so that we could have a pool from which to choose to find the best person possible. I made this request several times and was told, "We will have to agree to disagree."

About 2 weeks ago, I realized that negotiations had already begun. That information was something that I had to discover for myself and was not informed of. It seems that as 1 of 7 elected to this board that we should have all been brought up to speed. Especially since it was occurring at virtually the same time I was continuing to make my request to post the position.

When I spoke to the voters to convince them to select me as their representative in Anoka County, I told them that I believe in transparency in all government. I have not changed my mind in that regard. This process not only lacked transparency with the public, it was not even transparent to all the members of this County Board.

Since I got on this board, I consistently hear that we are supposed to arrive at consensus. I have struggled with that idea because there are some principles I just won't change my mind about. However, if you notice, it is a very rare occurrence where even one of us votes differently than the others.

This process was an opportunity where the others could have demonstrated how to arrive at consensus. In the end, there was no attempt at consensus in this matter. When I asked why we couldn't post the job I was told that, "This is the way we have always done this." I just asked why not try it another way. That conversation has taken place a couple times in the last several weeks. Those who have left me out of this process could have had the same result by posting the position. Seems like an easy thing to do, but it isn't the way we have always done things.

Also, regarding the fact that we very recently hired Kathy for a position in Human Services that seems to have very unique skills, it seems contradictory to the arguments I get when I suggest that we have an across the board pay freeze. When I have pleaded

my wish that we would not give pay increases under the current economic climate, it is said that our salaries are under the market and we end up training people with the end result that they get hired away by other counties. We just hired Kathy for that position which required months of training at great expense to the county. Now we will replace the position and train the replacement at great cost to the county. It was already decided that Kathy would be selected to fill Lona's position so it was a waste of money to train her for the Human Services job.

Lastly, as I conferred with many regarding how I might vote today I had a couple warnings. First, that it would be a permanent vote and may cause me to lose opportunities for projects in my district. I have been around for 2.5 years now and have developed a pretty decent rapport with each one of you. I don't believe that any of you would hold the citizens of Dist 3 hostage because of one vote I would make. The other warning was that Kathy may not work for me because of my vote today. I know Kathy better than that. She considers herself a servant to the citizens of Anoka County and would never play politics with her position.

My vote today will be no, but under no circumstances will I treat Kathy with any less respect and regard than any other employee in Anoka County.

4. Cash for Clunkers Pounds the Poor.

Can government do anything right? The Dog has exposed the foolishness of the \$3 billion cash for clunkers program all summer. Perhaps the cruelest effect of the program has received media attention just this past week from the Star Tribune.

Many of Minnesota's charities, which serve the sickest and neediest among us, rely on used car donations. These cars are then parted out, sold for scrap, or even repaired and passed on to those in need of one.

The cash for clunkers program brought many of these donations to a halt as those who might have otherwise donated their car instead turned it in for a fat taxpayer subsidy on a new car they would likely have purchased anyway.

Used car donations are the top fund raiser for Courage Center, one of the state's finest charities. Cash for clunkers was a blow to their fundraising efforts.

This is yet another example of government interference in the marketplace bringing about unforeseen consequences. Taxpayers shelled out \$3 billion we don't have to provide an incentive to people who didn't need one while hammering charities that provide immeasurable value to our community through their good works.

Way to go, Mr. President.

5. More Evidence Rail isn't eh Answer.

Speaking of spending money we don't have, Congress has appropriated \$8 billion of the "stimulus" money for trains (\$13 billion total), thereby handing out artificial incentives for

states to adopt yesteryear's mode of transportation. Never mind that our roads and bridges are crumbling and we're facing a national debt we'll never be able to repay.

Robert Samuelson this week penned a very insightful column on this subject that was featured in our Morning Blotter report.

To begin, if high speed rail was such a great idea, private investors would be lining up to put their capital at risk in the formation of a rail network.

Samuelson begins by taking stock of Amtrak's results since 1971. Since that time, the taxpayers have spent over \$35 billion with no measurable reduction in American foreign oil consumption, greenhouse gas emissions, or traffic congestion. In a nation of 140 million commuters, Amtrak moves just 78,000.

Some economists estimate the system proposed by the Obama administration would cost \$125 billion to build.

What greenhouse gas reduction? While Vice President Biden brags that the proposed rail network would take 1 million cars off the roads, this number is equivalent to less than one-half of one percent of all cars registered in the US, Samuelson notes.

Samuelson then finishes by restating what anyone who pays any attention to life already knows. Namely, that rail makes more sense in Europe and Asia because they have much higher population densities and shorter average trips.

But hey, when you're blowing America's future with reckless spending, what's \$13 billion or \$125 billion?

6. Centerville Group Home Controversy.

The Star Tribune this past week published a follow-up story to an earlier one regarding the potential establishment of a group home in Centerville.

Plans to open the group home were abandoned after a neighborhood meeting in which more than 100 local residents stated their opposition to the home.

What's interesting about this issue and the reporting of it are the unanswered questions.

According to the Star Tribune, residents became concerned after reading on the group home operator's own web site that the residents of the proposed home would be young men who had committed sexual offenses and exhibited aggressive and compulsive behavior. The article went on to note that the web site then changed the wording.

The article never explains, 1) whether or not the residents indeed committed sex crimes; 2) whether or not the residents exhibited aggressive and compulsive behavior; and, 3) what the changed descriptions on the web site were and the reason for the change.

Frankly, this is an example of shoddy reporting and the sorry state of affairs regarding newspapers. Questions central to the story were never answered. For example, whether or not these residents committed crimes and the nature of those crimes makes all the difference in assessing the moral correctness of the opposition to the proposed home.

As usual, the entire affair has exposed another ugly aspect of human behavior. Namely, chest-thumping self-righteous indignation of those who so publicly condemn the reaction of the neighbors who expressed concern. Perhaps these critics should stop talking the talk and walk the walk.

E-mail Update 9/8/09

In This Issue:

WATCHDOG SPECIAL EXAMINATION!

Was Kathy Tingelstad paid off?

Hiring by Anoka County raises questions, concerns.

Minnesota's political scene blew up this week when it was announced that former state Representative

Kathy Tingelstad was hired as an employee lobbyist for Anoka County. Taxpayer's League of Minnesota Phil Krinkie wrote a column suggesting the hire was payback for Tingelstad's vote to override Governor Pawlenty's veto of a \$6.6 billion transportation tax increase. The charge drew an immediate counter-column from Anoka County Commissioner Dennis Berg. The Anoka County Union also weighed in with a lengthy article. The controversy even drew remarks from MN2020, Matt Entenza's liberal blog (which also serves as a rest home for laid off Star Tribune reporters).

As usual, the mainstream media and even our counterparts in the blogosphere have missed the point and done a poor job in examining this issue. As usual, the Watchdog has been far out in front of this issue and will use today's column to lay out the facts and provide a framework for you to decide whether or not there was any impropriety regarding her hiring by the County.

NO DIRECT EVIDENCE

At the outset, it must be admitted that there is no direct evidence, no "smoking gun" to prove that the Tingelstad hire was a quid pro quo payback in exchange for Tingelstad's votes as a legislator. But that's not the end of the story. Because there may not be any direct evidence known at this time, it is still possible to examine the circumstantial evidence to see if there is a preponderance of evidence to suggest that her hire was, at the minimum, a reward for carrying the county's water at the Capitol.

COUNTY SHILL

That Tingelstad frequently did the County's bidding as a state legislator cannot be denied. In fact, Tingelstad played a central role in two high-profile issues strongly supported by the County: Northstar commuter rail and tax increases for transportation.

Tingelstad was Northstar rail's biggest cheerleader in the Minnesota House, where she served as the chief author of the Northstar legislation. In her role as chief author, Tingelstad chose to side with Anoka County against the political party that helped her get and stay elected. The Minnesota GOP at every level from the state on down to her own local party unit adopted a formal position against Northstar rail. Tingelstad ignored their pleas and pushed for commuter rail until she was ultimately successful.

Of course, Tingelstad's legislative career will forever be defined by the role she played in 2008 in passing a transportation tax bill that raised taxes by billions. Tingelstad will long be remembered as one of the "override six," the six GOP House members who voted to override the governor's veto of the bill.

Anoka County had strongly lobbied for transportation tax increases. Watchdogs will remember that the legislature unsuccessfully attempted to override a veto of transportation tax increases in 2007, one year prior to the infamous and successful 2008 override vote. In 2007, Anoka County Commissioner Dan Erhart was allowed to roam the floor of the Minnesota House to personally lobby Anoka County legislators to override the governor when the override vote was under consideration in the waning moments of that session.

In sum, we know that Tingelstad took enormous political risks to help out Anoka County at the legislature. In fact, her vote to override the governor made it doubtful she would have received the GOP endorsement for re-election and contributed to her decision not to seek re-election.

OUT OF POLITICS, IN NEED OF MONEY

In late March of 2008, shortly after the override vote, Tingelstad announced she would not seek re-election. According to an article in the Anoka County Union, Tingelstad chose not to run again because she was in need of a better paying job. Tingelstad was quoted as saying, "My focus for the next several years will be on paying college tuition costs for my sons," she said in her statement. "After 12 years in the Minnesota House of Representatives, my responsibility toward my sons' education means that the modest legislative salary prevents me from contributing to our family's financial well-being."

We know that in March of 2008, Tingelstad publicly announced that she was looking for work and was in need of money to cover college tuition costs.

POLITICS ENDS, COUNTY EMPLOYMENT QUIETLY BEGINS

Tingelstad's final term as a state legislator ended in early January of 2009 and her job search presumably began in earnest.

Through County sources, the Watchdog learned in mid-March of that year that Tingelstad had been hired by the County to work in their Public Health Department. To the Dog's knowledge, no other media outlet reported this news and the Watchdog once again scooped the Minnesota media establishment with our March 20 email update.

This hire was curious to say the least and raised a number of questions. First, the County never publicized the hire like they did for her hiring as a county lobbyist. A search of the County press release archives reveals no press release announcing the hire.

Second, there is nothing in Tingelstad's resume that would suggest she was an ideal candidate to hold a high-ranking position in the Public Health Department. She has no formal education, training, or professional experience in the field to speak of.

Was this job opening posted to the general public or was this another closed-door hire like the lobbyist position?

Moreover, sources within the County told an interesting story regarding the hire. Sources told the Watchdog that the County knew at this time that County lobbyist Lona Schreiber would retire that summer. According to these sources, some members of the County Board wanted to hire Tingelstad at that time as a lobbyist but ultimately held off because they didn't want to be seen hiring another employee lobbyist during a severe economic downturn while they were also publicly complaining about state aid cuts.

The sources went on to note that they were surprised when Tingelstad surfaced in the Public Health Department.

We know from this sequence that Tingelstad was hired by the County within weeks of her departure from the legislature and put in a high profile job that didn't appear to suit her skill set very well. We also know that the County did not publicize that hiring like they have for the lobbying job Tingelstad will assume.

Moreover, reliable sources told the Watchdog as far back as March that the County sought to hire Tingelstad as a lobbyist.

Given what we know and the timing of the lobbying hire, it appears that the Public Health job was little more than a soft landing for Tingelstad until the lobbying job formally opened and the County could her into the job.

NO POSTING, NO TRANSPARENCY

The news that Tingelstad has been hired as an employee lobbyist touched off a public difference of opinion among County Board members.

Commissioners Rhonda Sivarajah and Robyn West both voted against the hire and decried the lack of transparency in the County's hiring process.

While both stated that they felt Tingelstad qualified, they were disappointed that the County did not publicly post the job opening and give other candidates an opportunity to be considered. Moreover, West remarked that she was not consulted regarding the hire and instead was simply told of the hire.

With unemployment at a high-water mark, why wouldn't the County post this job and cast a wide applicant net? One would think that given the inevitable controversy surrounding the hiring of Tingelstad, the County would have at least posted the job and gone through the pretence of a job search process to deflect the very charges they're

fighting today. Was it arrogance? Incompetence? Both? In any case, this is yet another example of a ham-handed effort by the Good Ol' Boys.

QUESTIONS RAISED

What we know of Kathy Tingelstad's employment with Anoka County raises troubling questions that must be answered if the County and Tingelstad wish to dispel what is certainly a dark cloud hanging over their collective heads. While we may never know why the County hired Tingelstad or if there was indeed a quid pro quo deal, there is nonetheless the appearance that Tingelstad enjoyed certain privileges with respect to her employment relationship with the County that were unavailable to average citizens who may have been interested in either job.

First, Tingelstad was hired by the County within weeks of leaving the legislature.

Second, Tingelstad was hired into a position in the Public Health Department for which she was less than an ideal candidate. Why?

Third, the hiring of a former veteran legislator should have generated publicity on the part of the County. The County kept the hiring quiet for this job but not for the lobbying hire. Why?

Fourth, the lobbying job for which she was hired was never publicly posted to allow other applicants to express interest and be interviewed. Apparently, neither was the Public Health job. Why was she hired into two jobs for which she was not subjected to competition?

The Watchdog calls upon Kathy Tingelstad to answer, in writing, the following questions:

1. When did you first talk to County officials regarding the possibility of employment with the County's Public Health Department?
2. When did the County formally offer you the position with the Public Health Department?
3. When did you accept that position? What was your official date of hire?
4. When did you begin conversations with the County regarding a lobbyist position?
5. When was a formal offer of employment for the lobbying position offered?
6. When did you accept the offer?
7. Was the Public Health position merely a temporary position for you until the lobbying position formally opened? What discussions did you have with the County in this

regard? Were you hired as a permanent, full-time employee in this position? If not, what was the nature of your employment status in this position?

8. Did you ever discuss with County officials exchanging your vote for either employment or the possibility of employment?

9. Did County officials ever promise, explicitly or implicitly, that voting a particular way would result in County employment or the possibility of employment?

10. Did you ever vote a particular way in order to gain employment or other private benefit from the County?

Until these questions are answered, controversy will continue to swirl, despite the mainstream media's lack of interest and coverage. The County's reputation for arrogance and backroom dealing has been further enforced with this controversy.

Was there a quid pro quo deal? Was this payback of any kind? Or was it a legitimate hire based upon qualifications alone?

You decide.

E-mail Update 9/14/09

In This Issue:

1. Coon Rapids budget.
2. A new dog on the block.
3. We live in a democracy, not a monarchy.

COON RAPIDS BUDGET.

With the 2009 State Fair in the history books and the kids back in school, Watchdog thoughts turn to, among other things, the tax and spending plans of cities and counties. These local units of government are now making plans for their 2010 budgets, including property taxes.

Throughout the summer, the Watchdog has been examining the 2009 spending of local governmental units. Seeing how these folks have taxed and spent during the largest economic downturn since 1929 gives a window into the collective mindset of our local elected officials.

Today we take a look at Coon Rapids, one of Minnesota's largest cities and a current flashpoint regarding spending priorities as the city contemplates a community center that would add to the property tax burden while providing non-essential services that would compete with private businesses.

The Watchdog examined the city council's 2009 Annual Budget. Like other cities, Coon Rapids' adopted a number of questionable spending items for 2009.

Overall, city spending has been a trajectory that may not be sustainable over the long haul. Over the past ten years, city spending has increased by an average of nearly 5% per year. The 2009 budget represents a 2.7% spending increase over 2008. While a 2.7% increase may be seen as rather modest, the Watchdog wonders why spending increased at all when the citizens who are taxed to fund this spending were seeing decreases in their household and business budgets. While family budgets were shrinking in 2009, why was the government budget growing?

Moreover, why did the Coon Rapids budget expand by nearly 5% per year when the city wasn't growing at nearly that pace? In 2000, the city had 61,607 residents. In 2008, that number stood at 63,081. In 10 years, the city's population has increased about 2.5% total.

How about crime? In 2000, there were approximately 11,000 reported crimes in the city while in 2008 the number was 8,697.

In examining the budget, there were a number of areas where the city could have reduced spending or made other decisions to tighten the city's belt.

For example, the city lists 255 employees on the payroll yet states in the budget narrative that only 3 positions were eliminated. Really? The city could only find about 1% in position reductions? For many businesses located in Coon Rapids, eliminating only 1.2% of their workforce would have been a walk in the park.

No wonder that Coon Rapids, just like the state as a whole, lists government as a major employer. In fact, three of the 10 largest employers in the city are government:

1. Anoka-Hennepin Schools.
6. Anoka-Ramsey Community College.
10. City of Coon Rapids.

The Anoka-Hennepin Schools employ more people in Coon Rapids than the top 10 private employers combined!

The city council should set a goal to move the city out of the top 10 employers.

Of course, there is a litany of expenditures that beg the question of whether or not the spending is really necessary, especially in this economic climate.

- \$833,000 for professional and consulting services, presumably including community center planning.
- \$130,803 for dues and memberships.
- \$194,250 for travel and conferences. How about banning all non-essential travel? How about a one year suspension of conference attendance?
- \$460,000 (a 22% increase!) for fuel and utilities. Gas prices have fallen, not risen.
- \$153,000 for one bike trail extension and new signs for city parks. You couldn't wait one or two years for new park signs?
- \$115,000 for computer upgrades. Again, none of this spending could have been deferred?
- \$4,000 to promote "healthy lifestyles" to city employees. Is this ever a good expenditure? Goodness, Anoka County just received a multi-million dollar grant to browbeat everyone for eating at McDonald's.
- \$15,000 for arts performances. Does the city really need an arts commission?

In adopting a budget for 2010, the city council should take a hard look at these types of expenses and have the courage to make tough decisions. We're counting on leaders like Scott Schulte to help taxpayers weather this economic storm by finding ways for the

city to do more with less. Schulte has been one council member who has consistently shown good leadership and common sense on the council, probably because he's a small business owner. We need you more than ever.

Also, the Watchdog calls upon our readers to be more proactive. Don't wait for us to do things like examine government budgets. You've got an Internet connection and a television. Be involved and be proactive!

A NEW DOG ON THE BLOCK

One purpose of both the Anoka County Watchdog and it's sister publication, the Minnesota Watchdog, is to inspire regular citizens to take an active role in holding their government, at all levels, accountable for taxing and spending decisions. It is always a highlight for Harold Hamilton to hear from taxpayers who have become more involved in government because of his example.

The Watchdog is pleased to welcome and publicize other watchdog blogs and web sites that shine the light of thoughtful examination on government.

Since we're examining Coon Rapids today, it is highly appropriate that we welcome the Coon Rapids Watchdog to the family of patriots. Watchdogs in Coon Rapids should take a moment to visit the Coon Rapids Watchdog here.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Harold Hamilton, The Anoka County Watchdog and the Minnesota Watchdog are not affiliated or involved in any way with the Coon Rapids Watchdog web site.

WE LIVE IN A DEMOCRACY, NOT A MONARCHY

The Star Tribune North Metro section ran an article this week regarding Anoka County commissioner Scott LeDoux's battle with ALS, known as Lou Gehrig's disease. ALS is a particularly cruel disease and the Watchdog, while disagreeing with LeDoux's politics, wishes him the very best as he battles ALS.

The article, however, brought to the fore an interesting public policy argument regarding his successor. If a county commissioner is unable to fulfill his or her duties, the county board may declare a vacancy and order a special election to be held to elect a successor. A special election would also be called in the event a commissioner resigns or dies as well.

LeDoux opined in the article that he wants the law changed so the county board could appoint his successor, going so far as to name his wife as the person he would like to see appointed. More troubling, LeDoux stated that if his wife was appointed, he could later on boot her out of the seat if he wished to reclaim it.

Many citizens of Anoka County have weighed in on the issue expressing concerns regarding their right to choose a successor and the Watchdog agrees. An elective office isn't owned by anyone except the citizens who have the right choose the person who will occupy that office. An election certificate isn't a scepter to be passed off to favored political allies. The county board made a well-reasoned public policy decision that vacancies would be filled through a special election in which the people would choose the best person for the job and not a small group of insiders. This is the correct course of action. If LeDoux's wife is indeed the best choice, then the Watchdog is supremely confident the citizens of Anoka County District 5 will see her talents and give her the job.

Board chairman Dennis Berg does democracy a disservice and displays his own arrogance by proclaiming that "It's his (LeDoux's) seat." No sir, it isn't. Nor does your seat belong to you. All of them belong to the people of Anoka County.

E-mail Update 9/21/09

In This Issue:

1. Community Center Update.
2. The levy is coming, the levy is coming!
3. School board elections.
4. The trough runneth over.

COMMUNITY CENTER UPDATE

One of the biggest issues facing Watchdogs this fall is the Coon Rapids community center, AKA the "Regional Resource Center." Even if you don't pay taxes in Coon Rapids, you ought to be involved in the fight. When it's your turn to be victimized when your city council goes haywire, you'll need the same reinforcements.

On October 6th, the Coon Rapids city council will meet to make a decision regarding whether or not to continue to push forward with the community center and the property tax increases it will take to build and operate this proposed mega-complex.

The lead organization on this effort, the Coon Rapids Watchdog, is asking fellow Watchdogs to attend this meeting and demonstrate to the council that a \$60 million community center is not in the best interests of the city, especially when many taxpayers can't afford the property taxes they already pay.

The meeting starts at 7PM at city hall. If you don't show, it will send a message to the council that there isn't any real opposition to this ill-conceived project.

The Coon Rapids Watchdog web site also has an online petition concerned citizens can sign. Kristopher Olson of the group is also leading a door-to-door phase of the petition drive, which is ongoing. You can contact him via the web site to get involved with the door-to-door effort.

Finally, as the Anoka County Watchdog has reported, the city is seeking \$10 million from the state for the community center in the form of state bonding. A Watchdog source at the Capitol reports that it is highly unlikely that either legislators or the governor will support this bonding request. The community center is a purely local project that lacks consensus both at the city council level and within the community at large. Moreover, with all 201 legislators up for re-election in 2010, they do not want to be seen spending tax money on a mega-project that does not support core governmental functions. Instead, look for bonding projects that cover core infrastructure like roads, bridges, water/sewer, and the maintenance of government buildings like colleges and universities.

THE LEVY IS COMING, THE LEVY IS COMING!

Watchdogs in the Anoka-Hennepin School District should be aware that a school levy increase will be on the ballot this November.

Unlike years past, this levy issue has been in somewhat of a stealth mode, with very little publicity. Similar to years past, however, is the all-to-familiar apocalyptic warnings of what will happen if the tax increase isn't agreed to by voters.

The Watchdog at this time isn't going to pass judgment with respect to whether or not the threatened cuts are a legitimate consequence or a merely an idle threat.

What we will do is lay out the questions every voter should ask before deciding whether or not the District deserves more of your money.

First, the District has posted poor math and reading scores recently on statewide standardized tests. QUESTION: If the levy passes, what kind of improvement can we expect to see in test scores? What is the plan to raise scores? What happens and who will be held accountable if the promised score improvements aren't realized?

Second, has there been leadership by example with respect to budget difficulties? Specifically, has Superintendent Dennis Carlson shared the sacrifice? QUESTION: Will Dennis Carlson be taking a pay cut? Is he willing to receive the salary of the previous Super? When he was hired this year, the School Board apparently felt the financial situation wasn't that bad because they gave Carlson a pay raise over the salary previous Super Roger Giroux earned.

Third, what is the District doing to reduce costs associated with the central office? QUESTION: Will the District publish the organization chart, job titles, and salaries of central office employees? What is the plan to reduce costs in this area and other areas not directly affecting the classroom?

Fourth, school district costs are overwhelmingly associated with labor costs. QUESTION: What is the district doing to bring labor costs in line with reality? What is the District's plan to lower health care costs? What is the District doing to lower pension liabilities? Will new hires be placed on a defined-contribution retirement plan instead of the ultra-expensive defined-benefit retirement? Will teachers be granted cost of living increases? Will they be granted "step" increases? Will "lane changes" be granted? For too long, the media has allowed school districts to only talk about cost of living adjustments with respect to teacher contracts. The District should be talking about the total cost of both salary adjustments and the total cost of the labor agreement, including pension and retirement costs.

Before you vote, be an informed voter.

SCHOOL BOARD ELECTIONS

The Anoka-Hennepin School Board will be on the ballot for more than a levy increase this year. There are also school board races to be decided.

Three seats on the Board are up for grabs in November. In a commentary on the sad state of our democracy, two of the three seats feature no contest, with both incumbents going unchallenged.

Thankfully, District 6 voters will have a choice and not be stuck with incumbent (via appointment) Kathy Tingelstad. Apparently unable or unwilling to try making a living in the private sector, Tingelstad will be looking to take a deep double dip out of the public till by seeking to serve as both a government lobbyist and a school board member. This after a long career as a politician.

In addition to Tingelstad, Jeff Simon and Patrick Murray have also filed for the seat. While Simon is unknown to the Watchdog, Murray is a somewhat familiar face as the former principal of Johnsville Elementary in Blaine. Always professional and known for running a tight ship at Johnsville, Murray will bring instant credibility as a challenger because of both his experience and his name recognition.

It will be interesting to see how Tingelstad portrays her experience to sit on the school board to voters. After all, this is an election where the voters will do the hiring, unlike the public health job she formerly where she was picked by county insiders to hold a job for which her skill set seemed ill-suited.

The Watchdog invites all three candidates to submit a statement of candidacy tour readers. Statements may be submitted via email to Harold@anokacountywatchdog.com.

THE TROUGH RUNNETH OVER

It seems our county commissioners just don't get it. Their abuse of taxpayers goes on and on like a bad dream.

The latest abuse comes in a Star Tribune dispatch regarding the obscene amount of lobbying spending to get a chunk of the federal Monopoly money being printed under the Capitol dome.

States and local units of government are rushing to get a piece of the reauthorization for the Surface Transportation bill which Oberstar is responsible for crafting as Chairman of the House Transportation Committee.

Among those listed as spending bucks on lobbyists to get a piece of the pie are the Good Ol' Boys of Anoka County. The article notes that the County has spent \$90,000 so far to on this lobbying effort. What the article didn't mention was who was paid the \$90,000.

This publication will put our money on Elwyn Tinklenberg, who was recently scared off the electoral playing field for Congress when state Senator Taryl Clark announced her candidacy against Michele Bachmann. Elwyn promptly withdrew his name, which was probably best for him since he couldn't beat Bachmann anyway. 2008 was a prime year to be a Democrat, Bachmann committed a verbal gaffe that incited Democrats, and Ol' Tink still couldn't close the deal. It looks like whatever Elwyn is selling, the voters ain't buying.

E-mail Update 9/28/09

In This Issue:

1. Coon Rapids Community Center Update.
2. School Board/Levy Updates.
3. Blaine Airport Update.

Editor's Note: This week's edition is truly an "update" of ongoing issues. With Election Day approaching, Watchdog groups around the area are gearing up for either the election itself or key decision points regarding high-profile issues. Stay alert, stay involved!

COMMUNITY CENTER UPDATE

Both the media and sources within Coon Rapids city hall are reporting that October 20, NOT October 6, is the key date for the city council to make a decision regarding the proposed community center.

The city council will decide at the October 20 meeting whether or not to proceed to the next phase of project - design development - which could cost anywhere from \$257,000 to \$696,000, depending on the scope of the design and the ultimate size of the community center.

If you want your voice to be heard, make sure you attend the October 20 city council meeting.

Many Watchdogs have expressed concern that Tom Hanson, a member of Governor Pawlenty's cabinet, will be visiting Coon Rapids to receive a briefing from the city on the project. Many mistakenly believe that this visit signifies tacit support of the project and the city's \$10 million request for state bonding money to defray the cost. This is simply not true.

To understand why Hanson is visiting, you need to understand a bit about how state bonding projects are put together.

Next year, the legislature and the governor will work towards a bonding bill that will take the form of a bill that is signed into law.

The governor, the House, and the Senate will all submit bills that will ultimately be reconciled through the conference committee process. The legislative Capital Investment committees craft and process their bills while the Minnesota Management and Budget (MMB) Department manages the Governor's bonding priorities.

This entire process begins with fact finding visits around the state to various projects that were submitted to the state weeks ago. Members of the House and Senate Capital

Investment committees conduct their own "bonding tours" around the state. Likewise, Commissioner Tom Hanson of MMB tours the state on behalf of the governor.

The fact that a particular project receives a visit from any one of these three is no indication of support or opposition. Many projects that are toured ultimately fail to gain state support. Conversely, projects that are not visited sometimes receive state bonding monies.

In order to gain state support, a project must have state-wide or regional significance. This is the challenge for the proposed community center. While the city has attempted to portray the project as one of regional significance (hence the name, "Coon Rapids Regional Resource Center"), it really a local community center dressed up as something different. Republican or DFL, the folks involved in state bonding are sophisticated and not easily led astray. The city will likely have a tough time selling this project as what they claim it to be. Having said that, politics is politics, so eternal vigilance will be the price of our liberty.

SCHOOL BOARD/LEVY UPDATES.

There is a great deal of activity on this front. Here's the latest.

Anoka-Hennepin ISD #11.

There is both a levy and school board elections in this district.

As mentioned last week, three school board seats are open but only one features a contest.

Districts 3 and 4 offer only the incumbent on the ballot. Since filings have closed, only a write-in candidate would offer any real choice. This isn't a comment on the incumbents but is a poor commentary on our democracy that a school board seat would feature no meaningful choice.

In District 6, three candidates have filed for election. Kathy Tingelstad, who was appointed, will be running to be elected in her own right. Tingelstad is well known to Watchdogs and has a demonstrated history of big government love and a lack of independence from the Good Ol' Boys.

Pat Murray was mentioned last week in our update. Since that time, many Watchdogs have weighed in to positively comment on the candidacy of Jeff Simon, the third candidate. Again, the Watchdog is a non-partisan organization that will not endorse any candidate for office. What we will do is offer candidates an opportunity to submit a statement of candidacy. We encourage all to do so - even Tingelstad.

In addition to school board races, there is a property tax increase levy on the ballot. As usual, there is the threat of massive cuts and Armageddon should the tax increase fail. Last week, the Watchdog published a primer on teacher pay with questions that should

be asked of every school board before voters agree to a levy increase. It was encouraging to hear from so many Watchdogs who asked if they could use our questions and primers at public meetings regarding levies. Let the Watchdog be clear: everything we publish is designed to help taxpayers. Please shamelessly steal and use our material. We're not some elitist, snobby news organization that fears the "stealing" of our stuff. Take it!

Spring Lake Park ISD #16

In this district, a total of 8 candidates will compete to fill four at-large seats in the November election. All four incumbents have filed for re-election in addition to four challengers.

Like Anoka-Hennepin, this district will be asking for a property tax increase in November as well.

Saint Francis ISD #15

This district is once again going out for a property tax increase. It seems an annual ritual whereby the district asks for a property tax increase which gets rejected at the polls. Two questions will be on the ballot this fall. Will this be the year Saint Francis schools finally wins over the taxpayers?

This district has been roiled by tension and conflict for some time. Recently, the school board hired a pollster to assist the district in assessing citizen opinion regarding the schools.

Forest Lake ISD #831.

This district serves Anoka County citizens in the northeastern part of the county. This fall, no levy referendum is on the ballot but there will be elections for the school board.

Three seats on the board are open with 5 candidates on the ballot. Two of the 5 are incumbents.

The two incumbent candidates, David Gay and Eric Langness, have contacted the Watchdog asking that their candidate information be shared. You can learn more about their candidacies here:

www.DrDavidGay.com

www.EricLangness.com

Columbia Heights ISD #13

Oddly, there are two vacancies on this school board caused by resignations. In late October, the school board will vote on two appointments to replace the departed members.

There will be an interview process based on applications. The application deadline is October 2. If you meet the requirements and would like to be considered, view further information here.

BLAINE AIRPORT UPDATE

Concerned Citizens of the North Metro, the watchdog group following the Blaine Airport issue, is having another meeting:

October 7

6:00 PM

Northtown library

711 County Rd. 10 NE

Blaine (across from Northtown mall)

E-mail Update 10/5/09

In This Issue:

1. The Death of Silicon Valley.
2. Get Tingelstad a GPS.
3. Copenhagen Hortman.
4. Anoka County Digest.

THE DEATH OF SILICON VALLEY

By Harold Hamilton, President and CEO of Micro Control Company (Fridley, MN)

Micro Control is a manufacturing company found in 1972. During our 37 years of existence, our primary market has been the semiconductor industry. The majority of these companies are located in Silicon Valley. (just south of San Francisco) Lately it's becoming obvious that most of the semiconductor companies in Silicon Valley are moving to Asia. As one of our customers in that area told us last week, "Most of the semiconductor manufacturers in this area will have moved to Asia and will only leave a sales office behind."

During the last 45 years, the semiconductor industry has been a leading edge technology for our country's growth. The new technology ranges from the invention of the transistor (Bell Labs) to the invention of the integrated circuit (Fairchild and Texas Instruments). This has fueled a huge growth in semiconductor manufacturing in our country. Now they're moving out.

What's caused this sorry state of affairs? Governor Engler, the ex-Governor of Michigan, now heads up the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM). He describes it best by pointing out that the United States has the second highest tax rate in the world. In fact, we're only slightly behind Japan. Is it any wonder that Taiwan, Malaysia, Singapore, Korea and China are more competitive than the United States in semiconductor manufacturing? Their educating systems (k through 12) are also superior.

Will the United States people ever wake up and admit that we live in a global market place? The outlook for us doesn't look promising for manufacturing (including semiconductor).

Write your Congressman. Demand lower taxes and less regulation on businesses, including manufacturing.

GET TINGELSTAD A GPS

Former RINO and current Anoka County lobbyist Kathy Tingelstad must have been lost this past weekend. Heck, Watchdogs were about to call in the National Guard to assist the erstwhile lawmaker.

Tingelstad must have really gotten off track because she was seen at the Republican state convention. Yes, the REPUBLICAN state convention. Numerous watchdogs reported seeing her both Friday night and Saturday.

Is Tingelstad attempting to rehabilitate her mangled reputation with the Party faithful? That's doubtful. What's more likely is that she's sucking up to Republican legislators because she was no doubt hired by the County to be the "Republican" on the team with DFLer Steve Novak, the other County lobbyist.

As the Dog has noted, Tingelstad has her work cut out for her. Legislators we talked to at the convention see her as the same old choo-choo lovin', veto-overridin' RINO she always was. And yes, Kathy, they still haven't forgotten about your "no" vote preventing House Republicans from taking a needed recess to strategize an important floor vote.

By the way, Kathy, how come you haven't yet registered as a lobbyist?

Memo to GOP Chairman Tony Sutton: Saturday's convention proceedings were totally unacceptable and in need of fixing. There is no way delegates should wait 5 hours to cast a vote for the straw poll and then wait hours after that to see the results.

While delegates certainly deserve a voice in the governance of their Party, it's time to put some limits on the amateur Perry Masons who shamelessly waste normal delegates' time by debating meaningless differences in proposed rules and bylaws. This exercise in senseless arguing is one reason why the GOP finds it difficult to get people involved as activists. The Party leadership was served notice when the convention overwhelmingly laid proposed rule changes on the table to get to the straw poll.

Moreover, when you have people filing out of the convention hall with no results, it's demoralizing to those who put aside a Saturday to participate. Let's get it together, please.

COPENHAGEN HORTMAN

Can Obama do anything right? After proving that he can't manage the economy, the deficit, NATO, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, the United Nations, and health care reform, the Community Organizer in Chief (COiC) this past week sealed the reputation of his Administration as one that is immature, overmatched, and incapable of doing little in the way of meaningful governing.

Instead of governing, the White House continues to do what it does best - continue to campaign even though the election ended almost a year ago. In a week where the president should have been tending to real issues, the COiC jetted off to Copenhagen with Oprah in tow to beg the International Olympic Committee (IOC) to pick Chicago to host the 2016 Olympics.

And they can't get that one right, either. Ol' Chitown was eliminated right off the bat, sending Barak and Oprah home with heads hung low (on a big carbon footprint, we might add). So our COiC can't manage the IOC? No wonder he can't manage the rest of his agenda.

Anyway, to the matter at hand. The day after the IOC rebuffed the Leader of the Free World, state Representative Meli\$\$a Hortman (DFL - Brooklyn Park), announced her warmed-over plan to bring the Olympics to Brooklyn Park. The only new twist is the date - the 2020 Olympiad.

Apparently Hortman thinks she and her DFL colleagues have done such a bang up job managing the economy and the state's budget deficit they can all focus attention on landing a sporting event that won't happen for another decade. Talk about priorities. Or is it a convenient distraction from those same issues?

E-mail Update 10/12/09

In This Issue:

1. Thugging at the Capitol;
2. Public Employment: A Pretty Good Deal;
3. How Much is Enough?;
4. Paul "Puff Piece" Levy Strikes Again;

THUGGING AT THE CAPITOL

Watchdog sources report that the Good Ol' Boys headed down to the Capitol this week in an attempt to close down an investigation into Anoka County spending. The ending apparently wasn't pretty.

Commissioners Dennis Berg and Jim Kordiak asked for a sit down to complain that House GOP staffers were making "unreasonable" requests under the state Open Government law to see certain County spending receipts related to anonymous tips these staffers received regarding possible improprieties.

Of course, Anoka County doesn't like anyone looking to closely at their spending habits, so they thought they would "convince" the House GOP to see things their way. Sources say things ended poorly for the Good Ol' Boys when Minority Leader Kurt Zellers told Berg and Kordiak where they could stick their complaints. Zellers, a former college football player and North Dakota farm boy, doesn't suffer fools gladly. The Anoka County errand boys went home with their tails between their legs, where they no doubt received another verbal lashing at the hands Godfather Dan Erhart, who is probably in danger of having his dining habits exposed yet again.

The Dog has to wonder where super lobbyist Kathy Tingelstad was on this one. Where in the world was Anoka County's GOP insider when she was needed most? Perhaps this shows us how much confidence the county has in her relationships with former colleagues. Or how about Anoka County's chief lobbyist Steve Novak? At \$134,000 per year, you would think he would be on the case, trading on his superb Capitol reputation to vanquish these meddling Republicans. Maybe he was busy working his private lobbying job or at a power lunch trying to convince Zygi Wilf to renew his shattered romance with Anoka County (c'mon, baby, we've changed!).

If anything, the fact that Anoka County sent its capos to Saint Paul indicates that there probably ought to be some light shined on the County. Finding outrageous spending in Anoka County is like fishing with dynamite. Remember what happened when one intrepid man took a look at county spending? If not, read about it here.

PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT, A PRETTY GOOD DEAL

The Pioneer Press this week released a comprehensive, easy to use database listing the salary and other employment data regarding thousands of Minnesota public

servants. This searchable database is exactly the kind of tool watchdogs and other interested citizens need to educate not only ourselves but our neighbors with respect just how large and uncontrollable government has become. It's about time the major newspapers did something valuable to contribute to the public discourse regarding the size and scope of government.

One of the shortcomings of the database is that it doesn't cover city government, but this is nonetheless a helpful tool.

Editor's note: The most recent data is from 2008.

A sampling of two of the Dog's favorite big spenders:

Anoka County has 54 employees who make more than \$100,000 in salary, to go along with gold-plated benefits.

Steve Novak, chief lobbyist makes nearly \$134,000.

The Anoka County Sheriff's Office alone has 10 employees making more than \$100,000. While the Watchdog has never had a complaint about Sheriff Andersohn and his outfit, is it really necessary to pay a cop \$100,000?

Is it necessary to pay the guy who runs the recycling operation \$101,000?

The County's "application services manager" makes \$100,000.

The "director of income maintenance" makes \$110,000.

Does the parks and recreation director need \$116,000?

Anoka-Hennepin Schools:

The district has 56 employees who make more than \$100,000 per year.

The superintendent leads the way at \$155,000.

Many of the bureaucrats in the \$100,000 grand club are assistant principals. Save some money and eliminate their jobs. Sound far fetched? Just last week, the Wall Street Journal ran an article noting that many of America's most successful companies are eliminating "assistant" executive positions, finding that they offer little value.

With big salaries, Cadillac health plans and defined-benefit retirements, no wonder we're in trouble. It's easy to see that government is fast approaching a day of fiscal reckoning, just like the airlines, the auto makers, and other old-line industries experienced. Government's labor cost structure is unsustainable, even with big, job-killing tax hikes. Just take a look at California if you want an example of governmental collapse. Even with big tax hikes, major cuts and accounting gimmicks, that state is

facing a budget deficit that may equal fully 1/3rd of the total budget. Recession or not, we have government institutions who are spending money faster than taxpayer ability to pay. At some point Atlas will shrug.

HOW MUCH IS ENOUGH?

By Harold E. Hamilton

Last week I had an interesting discussion with state Representative Mindy Greiling from Roseville. She informed me that 49 cents of every dollar of gross income is not enough for our company to be paying the government. She said, "It's a fairness issue." I told her that since over half of our business is in Asia, we have considered moving our company to Singapore where the taxes and fees would be 17%. She was unimpressed. According to Representative Greiling, small businesses never move. One relevant question would seem to be, Why is South Dakota continuing to advertise here in Minnesota about what a great place South Dakota is for business, low taxes, good workers, etc? One can only assume it pays. Businesses are moving out of Minnesota.

One of Governor Pawlenty's concerns when he first took office as governor was the number of Minnesota businesses expanding in other states as well as the lack of businesses moving to Minnesota.

We can't create a meaningful number of jobs here in Minnesota when we continue to be one of the highest taxed states in the nation. California should serve as an example. Businesses are moving out. Why should we follow their lead? We should not.

PAUL "PUFF PIECE" LEVY STRIKES AGAIN

Star Tribune North Metro reporter Paul Levy is the master of the vapid, newsless, puff piece. He's more in the vein of a "lifestyle" section writer who fills column space with features on dog grooming, booya festivals, and reviews of the local high school production of "Grease." Except in Levy's case, the banal columns often feature biographical portraits of forgettable elected officials, both current and former (e.g. does anyone really care that Andy Westerberg is now on the Metropolitan Airports Commission?).

Levy's latest portrait piece featured long-time Anoka County Commissioner Dick Lang, an amiable fellow who has enjoyed a remarkably unremarkable tenure in public office.

We learn from the column that Lang's idea of constituent services is to walk down the street to a greasy spoon called the Red Ox café and receive input from old folks like Leonard "Ole" Swenson on important issues like trapping moles and where to buy the best plug of chewing tobacco.

Instead of hearing from Lang on important issues like where he stands on fiscal disparities, property tax reform, and the proper role of local government, we're instead

subjected to Lang's modus operandi of regaling constituents with tales of what Ham Lake looked like in the days of his long-passed youth.

The piece really did Anoka County residents a disservice by feeding into a stereotype that we're all a bunch of under-educated hayseeds who pass the time shooting the breeze down at the local coffee shop while life passes us by ever so slowly. When looking at the pictures accompanying the column, we half expect to see Jed Clampett in the background enjoying a bowl of grits with Jethro and Granny.

Frankly, Lang would do his constituents a favor and step down when his current (5th) term ends. It's time to get someone in that seat who is more in tune with the 21st Century than the 19th Century.

Retirement or not, the Watchdog is aware of a serious effort to recruit a former legislator to run for Lang's seat and bring some critical thinking and fiscal conservatism to a county board in desperate need of both.

E-mail Update 10/19/09

In This Issue:

1. Northstar Operator Slammed by Court.
2. Community Center Update
3. Prevailing Wage Fails to Prevail.

NORTHSTAR OPERATOR SLAMMED BY COURT

Major news outlets reported this week that the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway (BNSF) was fined a stunning \$4.2 million for misconduct associated with a lawsuit in which the railroad was found 90% negligent in an accident involving one of its engineers.

On September 26, 2003, four people were killed when a BNSF locomotive collided with a car carrying four people at the Ferry Street crossing in Anoka.

In addition to a \$21.6 million award in favor of the victims, the judge levied an additional \$4.2 million penalty against BNSF for serious abuses of evidence so frequent that the judge "lost count."

Many legal observers remarked that they couldn't think of a case like this in which the findings of abuse were so egregious and flagrant.

Consider:

Critical data regarding the performance of the crossing gates and warning signals at the crash site were destroyed as was the computer upon which the data was uploaded. In fact, the BNSF employee responsible for handling the data admitted he provided false testimony.

The Minnesota Stat Patrol, responsible for the accident investigation, was denied critical evidence.

Blueprints regarding a recently changed configuration of the signal system at the crossing were destroyed.

The judge noted, "The breadth of (the railroad's) misconduct in this case is staggering. This Court has lost count of the total number of misrepresentations BNSF made to counsel, the parties, and this Court throughout the proceedings."

So why is this story so important? While it's a tragic story in its own right, this story puts every Anoka County citizen on alert because BNSF will be operating Northstar commuter rail trains. The safety of thousands of people will be in the hands of the very same corporation which, according to the court, engaged in a pattern of deceit and misconduct.

What's more disturbing, the Minnesota legislature passed a law which will grant BNSF virtual immunity from lawsuits while they are operating Northstar trains. Sure, any victims will be able to sue, but guess who's on the hook for any damages? Take a look in the mirror, Watchdogs. The "deep pockets" belong to you, the taxpayer. Yes, the government will take the hit for any BNSF negligence.

To see the future of commuter rail in Minnesota, read "Death on the Tracks," a New York Times investigative series, which is recommended reading.

All aboard!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

COMMUNITY CENTER UPDATE

Tomorrow evening, the Coon Rapids city council will take public testimony and receive a briefing on schematics regarding the proposed community center.

According to the Coon Rapids Herald, the city council will likely not take a vote tomorrow evening. Having said that, the meeting is extremely important because public testimony will be taken at the meeting. Watchdogs, this is your chance to be heard. A small turnout by Watchdogs will be seen as a sign on support for the community center.

Look for Watchdog founder Harold Hamilton, a Coon Rapids resident, to speak.

The meeting will begin at 7PM at city hall.

On a related note, the Watchdog has learned that Kristopher Olson, who has been leading the fight against the mega-center, has filed paperwork to run for the Minnesota House of Representatives. Olsen will face DFL incumbent Jerry Newton for the District 49B seat, which was previously held by RINO-cum-lobbyist Kathy Tingelstad.

PREVAILING WAGE DOESN'T PREVAIL

As the Watchdog has observed on countless occasions, the Left has engaged in a concerted letter writing campaign through the local papers, most notably the Anoka County Union.

We witnessed another episode this week when a Ham Lake union sympathizer wrote to complain (6 weeks after the fact) that the Ham Lake city council failed to support a "prevailing wage" ordinance in the city.

A prevailing wage law essentially drives up the price of construction bids by forcing contractors and sub-contractors to often pay artificially higher wages instead of relying on the labor market itself to determine wages. Unions love a prevailing wage law, which benefits labor at the expense of consumers and those who foot the bill for a construction project.

Moreover, the Ham Lake prevailing wage issue looks to be little more than a political stunt designed to benefit Mayor Paul Meunier, who somehow got elected mayor of Ham Lake. To be charitable, Meunier's liberal views are way out of step with the majority of Ham Lake voters. It looks to the Watchdog like Meunier is trying just a bit too hard to impress his union supporters as he uses his mayoral seat as a mere stepping stone in his quest to get elected to the state Senate.

The other four members of the council unanimously rejected Meunier's support of the prevailing wage ordinance. This isn't the first time Meunier has been on the wrong end of a 4-1 vote.

Speaking of giving liberals a platform, perhaps Meunier can use his weekly column for the Anoka County Union to spin the issue in his favor. Perhaps Meunier ought to be counting the column as an in-kind campaign contribution from the ABC newspapers.

E-mail Update 10/26/09

In This Issue:

1. Under Budget? You lie!
2. Saint Francis Levy Trickery.
3. Community Center Not Wanted.
4. The Green Eyesore.

UNDER BUDGET? YOU LIE!

Next month, Anoka County goes back to the future when the Northstar train finally rolls down the tracks. You would have to be living under a rock to avoid the mega-bucks propaganda campaign to get us taxpayers feeling good about a 19th Century solution our transportation challenges.

Too bad the price isn't so 19th Century. Coming in at a stunning \$317 million, Northstar will continue to suckle at the taxpayer teat for years to come because of the need for millions in operating subsidies and no identifiable funding source (except rural bus service, which was ripped off to the tune of \$2 million recently). All this for a train that will travel a mere 40 mile route and carry only 3,400 people a day.

Commuter rail across the country is known for many things. For example, commuter rail projects require obscene operating subsidies. For another, they always experience cost overruns. In fact, one scholarly work found that many rail projects experience cost overruns because their backers lie about the costs in the first place by low balling them to placate the taxpayers.

So it was really no surprise when Northstar rail experienced a similar fate. Originally pitched as a \$165 million project that would run 80 miles between Minneapolis and Saint Cloud, Northstar ended up costing \$317 million to build and will only run 40 miles between Minneapolis and Big Lake. And while these numbers may seem small in light of the debt Obama and company are running up in Washington, they nonetheless have a similar thread in that we see smug, arrogant bureaucrats and politicians take us for fools by engaging in fuzzy math and typical politician double-speak.

Anoka County bureaucrat Tim Yantos (Salary \$127,450) is to Northstar rail what Steve Novak was to the failed Vikings stadium effort. Yantos is the pitchman, spin man, and right-hand man for the train.

And true to form, Yantos played the spin man role to a "T" this week. Of Northstar's cost overruns, Yantos said with a completely straight face that the project was actually \$10 million UNDER budget. You see, in the government world, when you start overspending, you simply adjust your target upwards, thus staying within the budget at all times. \$152 million over budget? Voila! The new target is \$327 million.

What's even more arrogant is Yantos' flippant statement that government has yet to figure out how to spend the \$10 million. Not a single mention of perhaps returning the money to the taxpayers. Then again, this is Anoka County government.

SAINT FRANCIS LEVY TRICKERY

Voters in the Saint Francis School District will go to the polls on election day to decide if that district will get a property tax increase. Numerous school levies have failed in the recent past and it will be interesting to see if one can pass in this economic and political environment.

Maybe the district is having a tough time because it isn't upfront about things. Twice in one recent news article the Watchdog found the district to be less than forthcoming.

First, one resident complained that teachers make an excellent salary for only working 186 days a year under the district's contract with the teachers. Superintendent Ed Saxton countered that many teachers work more than 186 days with some working as many as 260.

That may be true, but it's also true that teachers are paid extra for working these days. The response clearly misleads the reader into believing that teachers work more days for the same amount of money.

Second, the district will not finalize its new collective bargaining agreement with teachers until after the levy. If the district and the teachers want a property tax increase, they should engage in a good faith gesture by finalizing their contract prior to the levy vote in order to show voters exactly what teachers are (or are not) doing to share in the economic pain the taxpayers are feeling.

COMMUNITY CENTER NOT WANTED

Last Tuesday night, citizens of Coon Rapids gathered before the city council to provide input regarding the proposed community center.

At the outset, credit goes to the city council for setting aside time to hear from citizens. While some would argue that this is precisely what is required of public servants, we know that all too often they ignore the voices of those they are charged to represent. For example, can you imagine the Anoka County Board taking hours of public testimony? Hell, they won't allow people to speak at any meeting.

On the other hand, the council pulled one of the oldest tricks in politics by burying public testimony down on the agenda so those wanting to speak were made to wait for over 2 hours. Waiting out angry and concerned citizens is an age-old council tactic.

As expected, the majority of the assembled were against the community center project. Watchdog founder Harold Hamilton was one of the speakers. Hamilton noted that the

project, at its core, was about tax increases because the community center would require property taxes to subsidize operations.

Kris Olson, the man leading the opposition while mounting his own campaign for the state legislature, also offered noteworthy remarks. Perhaps the most compelling point in the evening came when Olson asked those in attendance who opposed the community center to stand. Nearly everyone in the council chambers stood, putting an exclamation point on the evening.

The citizens have weighed in. Will the council listen?

THE GREEN EYESORE

It didn't take long for the renewable energy chickens to come home to roost on the city of Anoka. After Anoka and 11 other cities agreed to shell out \$3.6 million to participate in a feel good wind energy project, the Watchdog immediately smelled BS and called them on it.

Anoka is currently in the process of erecting a monstrous eyesore windmill that will replace a grand total of - are you ready for this? - 1% of the city's power! Yes, a total of 1%! Enough wind energy will be produced to power the TVs and microwaves of about 40 homes in the city. At that rate, the city would have been better off to put a bunch hamsters on treadmills to power the city.

Now that the refurbished turbine is being installed, some members of the city council are feeling a bit upset because the windmill isn't apparently shiny enough. Because the windmill is used, it is worn and rusty, much to the consternation of the city fathers who must have thought they were buying the tricked-out, chrome-on-chrome turbine like the kind you see on the popular cable show "Pimp my Windmill."

Councilmember Mark Freeburg summed up the city's feelings when he deadpanned, "I feel like we got hosed." That may be true, but the taxpayers got hosed when you voted to fund this foolishness, Mr. Freeburg.

E-mail Update 11/2/09

In This Issue:

ELECTION DAY SPECIAL EDITION!

Election Day 2009 is upon us, Watchdogs. Tomorrow it will be your patriotic duty to get to the polls and cast your vote. On the national level, there are three "bellwether" races that will captivate the nation's attention. While our local races won't make CNN or Fox News, there are nonetheless important elections regarding our schools and local government. With low expected turnout numbers, your vote will be amplified. Here's everything you need to know about Election Day.

WHERE TO VOTE

You can find your polling location by visiting the Minnesota Secretary of State's web site [here](#).

You can also call the Anoka County elections office at 763-323-5275

THE ISSUES

The Dog will comment on some of the more closely watched races below. In any case, you can also find information about ballot issues and contests [here](#):

[Star Tribune](#)

[ABC Newspapers](#)

[Anoka County Watchdog](#)

NATIONAL ELECTIONS

Perhaps the most closely watched off-year race will be in Virginia, where Republican Bob McDonnell is facing Creigh Deeds for the governor's office, which is an open seat because the incumbent is term-limited.

This race is being watched closely because it is a true bellwether race that may well foreshadow the 2010 elections. Virginia has become a "purple" state that is no longer reliably Republican, given that the northern Virginia suburbs of Washington, D.C. have trended Democratic because of younger voters who are not native to the area. This trend was most pronounced in 2008, when Barack Hussein Obama became the first Democrat to carry Virginia since 1964.

The polls indicate that this race will go to the GOP. McDonnell is up by double digits in every poll. Most telling, independents are flocking to the GOP, concerned by runaway spending under Democratic rule and feeling the need for some balance. Moreover, many of the first time voters who turned out for Obama in 2008 have gone back to their

Playstations and Cheetos and will likely stay home while many previously disaffected Republicans are indicating that they will come off the sidelines to support their party.

Put this one in the GOP column. This race could be the canary in the coal mine for Democrats.

The other major gubernatorial race is in New Jersey where incumbent Democrat Jon Corzine faces Republican prosecutor Chris Christie and independent Chris Daggett, a former Republican.

This bitter race has been neck and neck between Corzine and Christie for weeks, as Corzine's negative ads and voters' flirtation with Daggett eroded a healthy lead Christie had enjoyed over the summer months.

If Republican Christie ends up winning, it will raise alarm bells at Democratic HQ in Washington. New Jersey is a reliable Democrat state where registered Democrats vastly outnumber registered Republicans. Moreover, Obama has invested heavily in New Jersey, stumping for the embattled Corzine multiple times right up to Election Day.

It will be interesting to watch two things in this race. First, how will undecideds and Daggett voters break? As the independent, Daggett will lose voters as some who were supporting him will feel they are wasting their vote and return to one of the two major party candidates. Second, voter turnout will be another key factor, as Democratic voter numbers will match up against the intensity of GOP voters. Will Democrats turnout? Are GOP voters truly motivated to turn out in large percentages?

Finally, it will be interesting to watch exit polls and what voters say about Corzine's risky strategy to make Christie's weight an issue. The svelte Corzine unleashed a series of negative ads at the end of the campaign that drew not-so-subtle references to the overweight Christie's large physique. With most Americans overweight, it was perhaps a bad move for Corzine to attack by proxy every corpulent New Jersey voter.

Finally, the eyes of the country will be on New York congressional district 23, an upstate district that has been in GOP hands for over a century. An open seat created by the appointment of incumbent John McHugh as Army Secretary caused a serious rift in the GOP when party bosses selected Dede Scozzafava as their standard bearer. A Tinglestad-like moderate, Scozzafava immediately panned by many party faithful, who turned to Doug Hoffman, who was running on the Conservative ticket. The schism laid bear the competing philosophies of the GOP between choosing "electable" candidates versus "pure" candidates.

The rhetoric was turned up a few degrees as national money and endorsements flowed into the race. Sarah Palin, Fred Thompson and our own T-Paw endorsed Hoffman while Newt back Scozzafava.

This issue was mooted when Scozzafava dropped out over the weekend. Having said that, this rave perhaps foreshadows the confrontations that will take place within the GOP over the next few months as moderates battle conservatives for the soul of the party.

ANOKA-HENNEPIN LEVY

The largest school district in the state will be going to voters on Tuesday to ask that an existing levy be renewed - and then some.

This levy question will be interesting for three reasons.

First, the district recently decided to close a number of schools and redraw the attendance boundaries of others. These kinds of disruptions tend to tee off parents and create intense negative feelings. The Dog will be taking a close look at vote totals from precincts of closing schools. That the district took votes to close schools just weeks before asking for more money is a risky proposition to say the least. It didn't help the district's cause that the school board had to revote on the closures after they failed to follow the law the first time around regarding public notice. A bush league mistake forced the board to remind voters one more time about the closures.

Second, of course, is the economy. With unemployment hovering near 10% across the nation and an economic recovery that looks slow and uneven, can the district convince voters to open their wallets when the district and its teachers haven't been able to demonstrate how they will share the pain? Can the district convince voters to shell out more dough when there has been no stated return on the investment other than "we won't cut as much?" In addition, the district has talked much about the need to cover inflationary costs. Huh? Inflation has been hovering around zero for some time. In fact, many economists worry about *deflation*, not inflation these days. Want some proof? Look to social security, where there will be no cost of living increase for the first time in over three decades. These COLAs reflect inflationary indicators and offer stark proof that inflation is nonexistent.

Third, unlike past levies, the pro-levy forces have kept a very low profile. In the past, levy campaigns had the look, feel, and funding of major political campaigns, complete with lawn signs, endorsements, phone banks, literature drops and parade entries.

This time around, there is none of that. Being a rather politically savvy group, it is likely that the pro-levy folks have decided that a major campaign would draw more negative attention than positive attention. In an off-year, it can be better to keep a low profile and work behind the scenes to gin up base support from teachers and other sympathizers who live in the district. In an off-year, your base voters can carry the day if they're turned out in fair numbers.

ANOKA HENNEPIN SCHOOL BOARD

Three seats on the school board are up for re-election. Unfortunately, two of the three seats offer no choice. Regardless of the talents and qualifications of the incumbents, voters in a democracy ought to have a choice when it comes to elected representation.

In any case, District 6 (parts of Coon Rapids and Andover) offers the only real race on Tuesday.

That race is technically an open seat because there is no incumbent. Former state Rep. Kathy Tingelstad, who can't seem to work anywhere besides government, was appointed to the seat in January to succeed Jerry Newton, who was elected to replace Tingelstad in the Minnesota House.

Tingelstad is attempting to be elected to the seat in her own right while simultaneously working for Anoka County as a government lobbyist.

Thankfully, voters will have choices in this race. Former Johnsville Elementary principal Pat Murray and Coon Rapids resident Jeff Simon are also competing for the seat. To their credit, both Murray and Simon submitted candidate statements to the Watchdog, which can be read [here](#).

Tingelstad ducked the Watchdog and refused to submit a statement. Perhaps the Dog can summarize her candidacy as follows:

- Appointed to seat by Good Ol' Boy network;
- No experience in education whatsoever;
- Tax raising Republican who cut and ran in 2008 after realizing she wouldn't get the endorsement after voting for a \$6.6 billion tax increase.
- Now works in the ultimate Good Ol' Boy job as an Anoka County lobbyist.

COLUMBIA HEIGHTS OVERREACHES

The Dog learned this week that the Columbia Heights School Board has appointed former legislator Barb Goodwin to the board to fill a vacancy on the board.

If politics wasn't behind this pick, then we're at a loss. As a legislator, Goodwin had a reputation for failing to grasp complex issues. Moreover, she also had a reputation for being rude, shrill, and hostile to political friends and foes alike.

With 11 other candidates vying for the job, it's hard to see how she could have been one of the top two picks (2 vacancies were filled). Other than some time on the education committee, there is nothing in Goodwin's background showing an expertise in the field of education. This, combined with her legislative reputation, should give taxpayers in this school district pause. Good luck with that one!

E-mail Update 11/9/09

In This Issue:

1. School Board Wrap Up.
2. Governor Race Update: Brian Sullivan.
3. Arne Carlson Running?
4. RT Enters the Race Backa\$\$wards.
5. Sen. Bakk Gives Preview of Dumb Ideas.
6. Pawlenty Proposes Common Sense Budgeting - DFL Goes Nuts.

SCHOOL BOARD WRAP UP

Election Day 2009 was a success for the good guys overall (e.g. Virginia and New Jersey) but not so great here on a local level.

Most school levies passed, including Anoka-Hennepin. Moreover, career politician and lobbyist Kathy Tingelstad will continue on the ISD #11 school board.

It actually isn't too surprising that most levies passed, even though the economy is tough and Anoka-Hennepin is engaged in some downsizing (which the Watchdog supports). First, the levies were held in an off-year with no other major elections on the ballot. These types of elections tend to more easily draw the "yes" votes over the "no" votes. Moreover, most levies were renewals of existing levies as opposed to new taxes.

With respect to Tingelstad, the two other candidates in the race, both well qualified, learned a hard lesson about campaigns. Tingelstad is a career politician with a good deal of name recognition. And even though she was appointed to the seat, that made her the de facto incumbent. If you're going to beat a careerist, you have to run a full bore campaign, complete with lawn signs, literature drops, phone banks, and an Internet presence. A couple of debates and an ad in the Coon Rapids Herald won't cut it. Hopefully, Tingelstad will be able to give full attention to the school board as those duties will compete with her duties as a lobbyist in Saint Paul. Tingelstad has now walked through the revolving door going from legislator to lobbyist.

GOVERNOR RACE UPDATE: BRIAN SULLIVAN

Multiple Watchdog sources are hearing the same thing others are reporting with respect to Brian Sullivan joining the already crowded GOP gubernatorial field. The conventional wisdom is that the current field lacks a "star power" candidate.

Assuming for a moment that the claim of a lack of star power in the current field is true, is Brian Sullivan himself the rock star candidate some activists seek? The Watchdog says no.

Sure, Sullivan is rich and thus able to self-finance. It's also true that he almost captured the GOP endorsement in 2002 after an epic battle with Tim Pawlenty.

But what about the downside?

First, Brian Sullivan is hardly a household name, even among Republicans. He may be well known to few GOP insiders, but he would need to spend a great deal of time and money introducing himself to voters in the same manner current GOP hopefuls would. Sullivan certainly has done little in the past 7 years to keep any kind of a public profile.

Second, Sullivan hasn't shown that he has overcome the personal faults that plagued him in 2002. He appears stiff and awkward while speaking in front of large groups. In small groups, he comes off as an egotistical, elitist snob. Multiple GOP activists have recounted tales of being snubbed by Sullivan or turned off by his demeanor.

One GOP delegate recounts a private dinner early in the 2002 campaign where Sullivan described his love of windsurfing and squash. The delegate immediately pulled out a dictionary when he got home to see what squash was.

A former GOP legislator recounts asking Sullivan for a meeting for the express purpose of receiving a campaign contribution from him, to which Sullivan agreed. After the legislator drove a long distance to meet near Sullivan's office, Sullivan kept him waiting for over an hour. After the meeting, Sullivan walked off without making a contribution and later ignored follow-up contribution requests.

A well-known GOP delegate and major fund raiser who supported Sullivan in 2002 would not support him in 2010 after Sullivan on two occasions insulted the delegate by turning and walking off while the two were engaged in a conversation.

In sum, the Watchdog fails to see any real substance behind a potential Sullivan candidacy. He's no better known than the current candidates and he has burned many bridges with delegates. Moreover, he has done nothing to raise his public profile and prove he is any better on the stump than in 2002.

ARNE CARLSON RUNNING?

A reliable Watchdog source reports that Arne Carlson is thinking of getting into the race for governor - either as an independent or a Democrat! At least the charade of being a Republican appears to be over. This same source reports that Carlson supporters are running polling to determine Arne's viability. Uh, Arne, it's time to leave the stage. Your 15 minutes of fame was up over a decade ago.

Speaking of being a Republican, it appears Ol' Arne, if he still considers himself a Republican, has violated Reagan's 11th Commandment admonishing Republicans to refrain from speaking ill of fellow Republicans. A Watchdog source reports that Carlson spouted off in a private meeting this week that Governor Pawlenty "should be strung up

in the village square" for refusing to raise taxes to solve the state's budget crisis. The Watchdog can think of a former GOP governor who ought to be strung up for building up the current bloated welfare state that is the source of our budget problems. It's the spending, stupid!

RT ENTERS THE RACE BACKA\$\$WARDS.

RT Rybak has officially entered the race for governor - and he's already screwed up. RT was really too cute by half, trying to run for governor without declaring he was doing so, but the Minnesota Campaign Finance Board was on to him.

Rybak's mayoral campaign commissioned a survey that it claimed was only for the purpose of helping his re-election campaign for mayor. Thus, Rybak didn't have to register a campaign for governor or pay for the survey with funds from a gubernatorial campaign account.

The Campaign Finance Board ruled that the survey was clearly for a gubernatorial campaign.

First, the survey targeted people outside the Minneapolis area. Why do this if you're only running to be re-elected in Minneapolis?

Second, the survey asked if the respondent intended to vote in the 2010 election. However, the Minneapolis mayor's race is in 2009.

Third, the survey asked what respondents thought of four current DFL candidates for governor.

Finally, some of the questions that were asked had little to do with Minneapolis but were clearly of state-wide significance.

The report concluded:

The Board concludes that the primary purpose of the survey was to gather information on how respondents reacted to the campaign platform of a gubernatorial candidate, and to provide feedback on which statements about Mayor Rybak gathered the most favorable response from voters who are likely to vote in the 2010 state elections. Therefore, the Board concludes that the \$26,500 expenditure for the survey was for the purpose of supporting Mayor Rybak's nomination or election as Governor.

Nice try, RT. It looks like you're running your campaign as effectively as you've managed Minneapolis.

SEN. BAKK GIVES PREVIEW OF DUMB IDEAS

Another DFL gubernatorial hopeful, state Senator Tom Bakk, was in the news this week proposing that Governor Pawlenty call a special session of the legislature (complete

with per diem payments, no doubt) to put a cool billion on the state's credit card with a massive bonding bill. Apparently Bakk is down with the idea that government spending creates wealth.

First, there is no need for a special session of the legislature. The gang will be here soon enough in a mere 90 days. Even if the legislature moved at light speed, it would be at least mid-December before a bill could be signed into law, gaining just 45 days. Oh, yeah, we're also in the middle of winter at that time making just a tad tough to build.

Second, the DFL would have us taxpayers believe that these projects will just fly out the door, curing the economy, cancer, war, famine, and everything else they believe government spending can cure. But that's hardly the case. In fact, there are right now some \$2.3 billion in previously authorized bonding projects going back to 2000 that are still unspent in the pipeline. The Watchdog is going to go out on a limb and propose the nutty idea of clearing out this backlog before issuing any more debt-financed projects. Crazy!

Third, as mentioned, this is simply credit card debt the state can't afford. Last November, the state busted through its debt ceiling limit - the first time that's happened since the ceiling was put in place in the 1970s. Behind health care spending, payments for debt service are the fastest growing expenditure area in state government. Credit may be cheap right now but it's not free.

Fourth, recent events have proven what economists have known all along. Namely, government can't spend out of economic trouble. Obama passed \$787 billion in debt-financed "stimulus" and all we have to show for it is 10.2% unemployment and a mountain of "IOUs" to the Chinese. What makes Bakk think a \$1 billion mini-mini-mini-"stimulus" is going to help? All this does is take money out of the private economy and put it in the public expenditure realm. You don't create wealth by having government pay one guy to dig a hole and another to fill it.

If this is Bakk's idea of good government, he's doesn't have a shot at being governor.

PAWLENTY PROPOSES COMMON SENSE BUDGETING - DFL GOES NUTS.

If the DFL goes nuts over something, it must be a good idea. No, a great idea. This week, Governor Pawlenty unveiled a simple budgeting plan that has put collective DFL undies in a bundle.

Under Tpwaw's plan, the state couldn't spend any more in a budget cycle than was brought in revenues in the previous budget cycle.

For example, say that in fiscal years 2009 -2010 (don't forget the state runs a two-year budget cycle) the state brought in a total of \$35 billion in revenue. For the fiscal year 2011-2012 budget cycle, the state could not spend more than \$35 billion. If revenues fell below \$35 billion, the state could raise taxes to cover the shortfall. Conversely, if

revenues exceed \$35 billion, the state could refund the money, put it in a budget reserve, or even spend it on one-time expenditures. The state simply couldn't spend it on items that are built into future budgets.

Why is this needed? On average, state budgets have increased by an average of 21% each budget cycle. Yes, 21%! This is because our state budgets on guesswork about what the legislature might want to spend in the future instead of taking a look at what it has in revenues.

Take a household example. If a family brought in \$50,000 in income in 2009, they wouldn't plan on spending \$60,000 in 2010 because that's what they want to spend. A prudent family would plan a budget based on \$50,000 because that's what they earned.

Spending no more than you bring in is a dose of common sense the DFL is allergic to after 40 years of 21% spending increases.

E-mail Update 11/16/09

In This Issue:

1. Tom Snell - Rock Star?
2. The Vikings are Back in Anoka County.
3. Community Center Work Shop Scheduled.
4. Spring Lake Park Taxes More.
5. Northstar Opens with No Plan to Pay Expenses.
6. The Hortman Unit Reports.
7. Harold Hamilton in the News.

TOM SNELL - ROCK STAR?

MetroNorth Chamber of Commerce head honcho Tom Snell is well known to this publication's readership. Like the prodigal son, Snell is a lovable, well-meaning guy who frequently needs help from the Watchdog to stay true to free market principles and avoid the negative influence and evil clutches of the Good Ol' Boys network. Whether its Northstar rail, the Vikings stadium, or certain school levies, the Watchdog has been forced to dish out some tough love while reminding Snell of his fundamental duty to protect small business in Anoka County from higher taxes and more regulation.

To be fair, Tom has also been an ally on many issues as well. In the final analysis, Tom Snell has been an asset to area businesses and a friend to both the Watchdog and Harold Hamilton.

That's why we were a bit surprised this week to see that Snell has announced his somewhat imminent retirement from the Chamber he has served for over 25 years. And while his retirement is well-deserved after such a long tour of duty, the Dog can't help but needle Snell a bit on his retirement plans. Specifically, Snell has announced that he plans to retire "sometime in 2010."

Sometime in 2010? Only rock stars, corporate titans, and celebrities announce plans that far in advance. Snell joins the ranks of folks like Jay Leno and the Rolling Stones in giving such advance notice. Tom, let the Watchdog be the first to wish you well in your future endeavors as you embark on your year-long "farewell tour" of Anoka County!

And yes, we did notice that you listed your biggest professional disappointment as failing to land the Vikings in Anoka County. Yeesh. If you end up working for Anoka County after this, we'll retract every nice thing we ever said about you.

THE VIKINGS ARE BACK IN ANOKA COUNTY

After a high-profile break up, the Vikings are back in the North Metro for the first time since jilting the Good Ol' Boys at the altar.

The TwinCities North Chamber of Commerce will host Vikings stadium shill Lester Bagley for a luncheon to talk about - what else? - the need for a taxpayer-subsidized stadium.

Bagley will alternately bore and browbeat the assembled at the following date, time, and location:

Seasons Restaurant, Bunker Hills Golf Course

Thursday, November 19

11:30 - 1 PM

It will cost you \$16 dollars for the privilege of listening to Bagley bray, bloviate, and brag.

Masochists can get details here.

The Dog loves the TwinCities North Chamber but they must be hurting to bring this guy out to speak.

COMMUNITY CENTER WORK SHOP SCHEDULED

The Coon Rapids City Council will be meeting TODAY in an extended workshop to discuss in further detail the community center proposal. The purpose of the workshop is to attempt to reach consensus on the project. The goal is to have the council take formal action one way or the other at the December 1 regular meeting.

While there is nothing wrong with discussing issues, the Watchdog would simply like to see this project go away. Higher taxes are never the answer to the need for more jobs and a higher quality of life. The fear is that the council will simply adopt some sort of "middle ground" proposal that nonetheless means higher property taxes for Coon Rapids residents. A pig with lipstick on it is still a pig.

This workshop is open to the public. Details:

Monday, November 16

3PM

Anoka Ramsey Community College (Legacy Room)

SPRING LAKE PARK TAXES MORE

One way or another, Cities will find a way to make you pay. In addition to the property tax, which is difficult to understand and only partially related to ability to pay, cities have all sorts of cute franchise "fees" and utility taxes which are often hidden and not remotely transparent.

The latest example is Spring Lake Park's proposed "utility franchise fee" that would be charged to utility companies for the ostensible purpose of using the city's right of way in delivering service to city residents. The proposed tax would generate a minimum of \$200,000 per year. Of course, the utilities won't really pay this tax. Instead, it will be

passed along to Spring Lake Park taxpayers, many of whom have been battered by the economic downturn and can ill afford higher taxes of any kind.

Watchdog's should be asking their city leaders just what kind of fees and taxes are being charged for services like sewer, water, electricity, and trash removal.

For those living in Spring Lake Park, you can tell your city council what you think of this hidden tax increase here.

NORTHSTAR OPENS WITH NO PLAN TO PAY EXPENSES

Okay, we're supposed to get all excited today because Northstar rail is rolling down the tracks to deliver a heavily-subsidized ride to the precious few who are heading to downtown Minneapolis and will have no need for a car all day.

In a classic example of "give them bread and circus", we've all been exposed to panoply of gimmicks and trinkets like free train rides, oompah bands at the stations, and slick multi-colored newspaper ads touting "Minnesota's newest star."

Big deal. At \$317 million, the cost is way too much and the benefits too few. Moreover, the Watchdog will continue to point out that all these rail projects have no plan whatsoever to cover the heavy operating subsidies they require. In fact, look for the Minnesota Department of Transportation's state-wide rail plan to point out this fact when the study is released late this year.

Watchdogs have no doubt noticed the incredible improvement in traffic flow on Highway 10 between Egret Boulevard and Hanson Boulevard since a \$12 million lane expansion was completed a few days ago. Even at the height of rush hour, traffic flows smoothly and the ramp meters aren't required to be turned on.

Think of what might have been had Northstar's \$317 million been dedicated to improving Highway 10 instead of blown on 19th Century transportation technology.

THE HORTMAN UNIT REPORTS

A few weeks back, we reported that state Representative Denise Dittich (DFL - Champlin) was leading the DFL "small business caucus", which is little more than a front group to portray DFL legislators as being pro-business while they shamelessly pursue a raft of job-killing tax increases.

A small business owner in state Rep. Meli\$\$\$a Hortman's district reports this week that Hortman is now attempting to portray herself as a politician who is interested in improving Minnesota's business climate.

Hortman, like other DFL legislators, is touting an on-line survey published by the House DFL Caucus regarding Minnesota's small business climate.

The Watchdog encourages all business owners in Minnesota to take the survey. Let the DFL know their tax hikes, regulations, and sucking up to Big Labor does nothing but discourage job creation.

In the meantime, enjoy a quick look at Hortman's voting record:

NFIB: 11% approval

MN Chamber of Commerce: 15% approval

Taxpayer's League of MN: 13% approval

Yes, Meli\$\$a, you're a real friend of free enterprise.

HAROLD HAMILTON IN THE NEWS

Watchdog founder Harold Hamilton appeared on the "David Strom Show" Saturday to talk about his web sites, politics, and the business climate. You can catch a podcast [here](#).

E-mail Update 11/23/09

In This Issue:

1. Minnesota Government - Keep em' Accountable!
2. John Henry Erhart is a Steel-Drivin' Bullyin' Kind of Man.
3. Tingelstad and the ANOKA-hennepinSchool District.
4. "Tax" is Spelled F-E-E.
5. Community Center Update.

Minnesota Government - Keep em' Accountable!

Besides their irrational hatred of Governor Pawlenty in general, the DFL has gotten all atwitter of late with his legislative proposals to do all sorts of "crazy" things like allowing people the freedom to buy health insurance from other states or balancing the state's budget because the overwhelming DFL legislative majorities were unwilling to put forward a balanced budget themselves.

The latest "outrageous" proposal from the Governor has really got the DFL twisted like a pretzel because it goes to the heart of what they treasure most - spending money. Specifically, T-Paw proposes that a constitutional amendment be put to the people in November that would simply limit spending to what the state takes receives in tax revenue. In other words, the state would look at the taxes collected in the previous biennium and limit expenditures to that amount. So, if the 2010-2011 budget period brought in \$31 billion in tax revenue, the state couldn't spend more than \$31 billion in the next biennium. What a radical idea!

You see, the reasons the state lurches from budget "crisis" to budget "crisis" is because the state bases its future budgets on what it thinks it will SPEND, instead of basing its budget on what it RECEIVES.

Take the current biennium, which once again is the fiscal year 2010-2011 budget. The state is projected to spend about \$31 billion from the general fund. In 2012-2013, the projected spending figure is \$38 billion, a \$7 billion increase! This is where the DFL comes around talking about a \$7 billion deficit. Why \$38 billion? Because our state budget forecasters think this is what the state will want to spend, with no consideration given to what we actually have to spend.

Does any household or business act this way? For example, say a family has an annual income of \$50,000. Does the family base its budget on \$50,000 or does it base it on \$75,000 because that's what they think they want to spend in the coming year? Of course, the family will base its budget on what it HAS, not what it WANTS.

Government, as usual, has it backwards.

Check out this statistic. Since 1960, the state's budget has increased an average of 21% each budget cycle. 21%! That bears repeating: The state's budget since 1960 has increased an average of 21% each budget cycle. That's way above inflation and population growth.

So what can we do about it? The Dog wants you to check out a web site dedicated to promoting the Governor's proposal. The web site offers opportunities to get involved and make a difference. Sick of all the spending? Then click [HERE!](#)

John Henry Erhart is a Steel-Drivin' Bullyin' Kind of Man.

Now that the \$317 million Northstar choo choo has begun offering a microscopic fraction of the commuting public a heavily-subsidized ride, you would think that Northstar rail and its chief shill Dan Erhart had discovered a cure for cancer, sent a man to Mars, and solved world hunger all in one fell swoop.

The Star Tribune's Paul Levy is always happy to oblige with a puff piece on the Good Ol' Boys, probably in order to secure a soft landing on the government payroll should he be one of the next employees to get pink slipped off the sinking ship at 425 Portland Avenue.

Of Levy's puff pieces, this one was undoubtedly the most obsequious. To read Levy, one is led to believe Erhart built Northstar with his bare hands. Now if eating your way through 5 star restaurants on the taxpayer dime was the 21st Century equivalent to driving spikes and setting rail, Erhart would indeed have single-handedly run a line from Big Lake to San Diego and back.

What's funny is that Erhart is his own unwitting critic in the piece, as every time he's quoted the reader can sense his arrogance, elitism, and self-righteous sense of entitlement to taxpayer monies. Reading this piece is valuable in that it gives readers a true understanding of the mentality that has allowed Erhart to spend thousands upon thousands of taxpayer dollars on restaurants, junkets, and contracts for those who turn around and contribute to his political campaigns. It also easy to see Erhart has no understanding regarding why so many of us taxpayers find that type of behavior deplorable.

Erhart is a "visionary" because of this train? Hardly. Northstar rail is little more than a \$317 million legacy project that relies on 19th Century technology and millions in operating subsidies for generations to come.

The Watchdog hopes that readers didn't miss the story that encapsulates the Northstar story. MPR sent a vehicle to Big Lake to compare travel times between Northstar rail and vehicle travel. The difference? The train beat the car by a whole 2 minutes. 2 minutes! In other words, we spent \$317 million in taxpayer dollars so people could get to work 2 minutes faster. \$317 million to fit in an extra trip to crapper at work is just outrageous.

So Erhart thinks a hard-a\$\$ approach works? Truth be told, Northstar would have likely been a done deal years earlier and the Vikings stadium just might be headed to Anoka County had Erhart not been so involved in these projects. His hostility and lack of

personal skills created powerful enemies in a number of places. The fact that his colleagues on the county board saw this problem and fired him as board chairman speaks volumes. Multiple sources at the Capitol report that Erhart has given himself and the county a very poor reputation with legislators and staff on both sides of the aisle.

In many respects, Erhart is a Watchdog's best friend.

Tingelstad and the ANOKA-hennepin School District.

Our good friends on the other side of the river are learning a hard lesson, it seems. We have heard that they feel that former RINO and current ANOKA-hennepin school board member Kathy Tingelstad cares more for the "ANOKA" part than the "Hennepin" part. Well, that's not surprising. Tingelstad represented Anoka County in the legislature and now represents that same county on the school board. Most importantly, she's an honorary member emeritus of the Good Ol' Boys club here on the east side of Old Man River, hence her appointment to the school board and her hiring as a lobbyist for the county. What has Hennepin County ever done for her?

Sorry, guys. You need a lesson in how politics works here in Anoka County. The first lesson is how to dismiss criticism merely by calling it untrue. Check exhibit "A."

"Tax" is Spelled F-E-E.

Taxes or fees, it's all the same. It's money out of your pocket and into the hands of government.

The Anoka County Union reports that the county jacked up a bunch of fees this week. Thank goodness. Unemployed taxpayers in the county were probably starting to worry that Anoka County government didn't have enough money to get by and were eager to give some more of their dough to a bureaucracy in need.

According to the story, there were some TEN pages of fees, with most increasing the fee instead of lowering it.

Thank goodness. We just couldn't stand the sight of Dan Erhart on the corner in downtown Anoka with a tin cup in hand.

Community Center Update.

The city council will be meeting again on December 8 at a time and place to be determined to receive more information and attempt to find consensus on a community center.

According to the Coon Rapids Herald, this is what appears to be in:

- Ice arena;

- Senior center;
- Indoor playground;
- Party rooms;
- Concession stand.

Here's what's apparently out, at least for the time being:

- Pool;
- Gym;
- Fitness center;
- Running track.

Councilman Joe Sidoti is quoted as saying he won't support anything that competes with the private sector. Good to hear. But that also means supporting nothing more than an ice arena, as everything else listed in the "Yes" column besides that can be serviced in the private sector.

Senior center? That's called the VFW.

Indoor playground? "Grand Slam" and "Pump it Up" are in the area, plus much more.

Party rooms? Most restaurants and hotels have that.

E-mail Update 11/30/09

In This Issue:

1. Necessity is the Mother of Invention.
2. November Forecast Looks Bleak.
3. The Myth of Government Charity.

NECESSITY IS THE MOTHER OF INVENTION

Government rarely does anything difficult unless forced to do so. While the economic downturn has caused no small amount of pain, there are indeed some salutary benefits.

One of them is that it is one of the rare forces that can overcome governmental inertia. While local units of government have loudly whined and complained about budget cuts and limits on income tax increases, these limits have finally forced local units of government to seriously pursue spending reductions and other efficiencies, much like businesses do on a daily basis.

The Star Tribune reported this week that Anoka County has closed its medium security facility in Lino Lakes. The facility apparently has been underutilized, so it will close with the remaining scofflaws being transferred to Sherburne County under a contract with the county. The move will save an estimated \$650,000 annually.

Anoka County also estimates that over \$1 billion could be saved by cutting Dan Erhart's government credit card and forcing him to brown bag his lunches. Okay, maybe we're exaggerating a tad but the suggestion remains!

This kind of shake out in local government is long overdue. Minnesota has 852 cities and 87 counties. Frankly, it's time for a wave of consolidation among cities and counties to gain economies of scale and more efficiently deliver core services. It's time for some cities to unincorporate and move back to a township form of government. A prime example of the lunacy of local government is the number of tiny cities with their own police force. If a city of 30,000 plus population can get by contracting with the county sheriff for protection, so can these hamlets with 1,000 or 2,000 people. The simple fact is that local government in Minnesota is inefficient and reform is long overdue. The Watchdog hopes Governor Pawlenty will accelerate this reform by cutting even more local government aid payments (AKA city welfare) next month and in 2010.

NOVEMBER FORECAST LOOKS BLEAK

This coming Wednesday, the state will release the latest budget forecast. Watchdog sources report that the forecast will show a current bi-ennium deficit in excess of \$1 billion.

This deficit can be resolved in three ways. First, the governor can unallot, as he was forced to do this summer. Second, the legislature and the governor can agree on a

supplemental budget that resolves the deficit. Third, the legislature and governor could punt, leaving the issue for the next governor and legislature to decide after the 2010 elections. Technically, the Minnesota constitution requires that the budget be balanced at the end of the bi-ennium, which is June 30, 2011. This last course of action is highly unlikely for two reasons. First, Governor Pawlenty would likely not walk out the door in early 2011 leaving a budget deficit. Second, each day that passes means more money is spent by the state, leaving less available for any budget fix.

THE MYTH OF GOVERNMENT CHARITY

The worst economy since the Great Depression has finally forced government to face the cold, hard reality that it has been living beyond its means for many, many years. The economy has finally exposed the unsustainable level of government spending that was masked for so long by a roaring economy that itself was built on the shaky foundation of easy credit and enormous asset bubbles that have burst.

State government spending is unsustainable

Being frequently in the hands of DFL leadership, Minnesota is among the big government spenders now taking the long hard fall into economic reality. Since 1960, Minnesota government spending has increased an average of 21% each and every two-year budget cycle. Is it any surprise that we have lurched from budget crisis to budget crisis every time the economy dips.

In addition to exposing an unsustainable spending model, this downturn has also exposed the inability of the DFL to lead. Despite overwhelming majorities in both chambers of the legislature, the DFL has been unwilling to show the leadership necessary to bring about a truly reformed state government that aligns spending with economic reality. The DFL, afraid to confront a special interest constituency dependent upon profligate government entitlements, offers nothing in the way of public policy ideas beyond the status quo plus a tax increase. Moreover, "listening sessions" "leadership summits" and "task forces" have become nothing more than an excuse for inaction and lame cover for DFL leaders to push off hard decisions as they wring their hands while Minnesota burns.

This DFL inaction has forced Governor Pawlenty to fulfill Minnesota's constitutional obligation for a balanced budget through unilateral executive action known as "unallotment." As the fastest growing and one of the largest programs in the state budget, health and human services was a necessary area of reduction. In fact, health and human services spending growth threatens to consume the entire state budget within the next decade.

Of course, Pawlenty's actions have elicited a chorus of hysterical complaint from the usual suspects, which isn't surprising. What is surprising to some extent is the invocation of religion and the name of Jesus in particular to justify their criticism. To a great extent, these critics seek to co-opt the name of Jesus in this political debate.

And while the Watchdog normally avoids any discussion religion, it has become quite necessary to call out these malcontents who buttress their calls for big government with appeals to the Bible.

Government programs are not charity

Essentially, the critics argue that Jesus would speak out against budget cuts to welfare programs. Put another way, the claim is that any reduction in government spending in these areas is immoral, with the unstated conclusion that any elected official who makes these cuts is therefore acting immorally and contrary to the teachings of Jesus.

While the Watchdog staff will never claim to be stocked with theologians, our research of the New Testament finds no support for the claim that Jesus ever advocated for government social programs. Jesus never called upon the Romans to enlarge the safety net or called for higher taxes to effectuate the feeding of the hungry or the clothing of the naked.

This is because there is no such thing as government charity. An act of charity is defined as a voluntary sharing of one's resources to assist others. The defining characteristic of charity is its voluntary nature. The giver is under no obligation to share but does so freely without any expectation of anything in return.

By contrast, the taxes we pay to fund welfare programs are most definitely not charity. Government collects taxes by threat of force and the deprivation of liberty. Monies are collected at the point of a gun with no possibility of appeals to the sovereign for mercy or leniency. The Minnesota Department of Revenue and the IRS demand that taxes are due by April 15th, no exceptions. Fines, penalties, interest payments, jail time, and the seizure of your private property are some of the possible outcomes for anyone who fails to pay their tax liability on time and in full.

Another feature of a true act of charity is the ability to choose the beneficiaries of our charity. This is hardly a feature of government programs, where recipients of charity are often non-profit groups with whom we disagree but are the favorite of a particular politician or bureaucrat, which allows them to be generous with someone else's money.

It also interesting to note that many of those who self-righteously call for more government spending in the name of welfare demand that government seek more money from others besides themselves. They never miss an opportunity to appear before a microphone to call for their neighbors to suffer a tax increase but not themselves. Perhaps these folks should set the example by writing a check to the government out of their own pockets before demanding that someone else's wealth be subject to seizure.

The death of private charity

Of course, any increase in taxes is a transfer of wealth from the private economy to the public economy. In other words, more money in government coffers means less money

for people to contribute to private charity, not to mention less money for the family budget in general.

Another very troubling aspect of the trend in American charitable giving is the death of private charity. Years ago, there was a very bright line between private charitable organizations and government welfare programs. Today, that line has become blurred to a large extent.

It is distressing to see the number of churches and non-profit charities that testify against any cuts to social welfare programs. They do this in part because they themselves receive government funds in the form of grants which they administer on behalf of government. In short, these organizations have become a constituency of government and thus dependent on government spending. In fairness, it must be noted that the GOP has been guilty of supporting this type of arrangement in the name of "faith-based" programs. In addition to making non-profits dependent on government, these arrangements also blur the line between church and state separation.

Government monies flowing into these non-profits also serve as a type of Trojan horse that leads to more governmental control. In addition to being dependent upon the money, these organizations must also adhere to governmental rules regarding which populations must be served and the way in which they are served, meaning that the non-profit must abandon some beliefs if it is to receive funds.

In sum, the difference between private and public charity is enormous. The rise in government "charity" threatens our freedom and erodes the independence of private charitable organizations while further tipping the balance of power between the citizen and the state in favor of the state.

E-mail Update 12/7/09

In This Issue:

Pearl Harbor Day - We Remember

1. Its Rally Time!
2. Sex Offender Alert - Anoka County.
3. If You Thought Northstar Rail was Bad...
4. Anoka County Budgets for Pay Increases.
5. Teachers Ignore Economic Reality.

IT'S RALLY TIME!

Loyal readers, this is a call to action! Tomorrow, the Capitol in Saint Paul will come alive for a rally in support of the Governor's proposed constitutional amendment to limit government spending! As reported in an earlier edition, Governor Pawlenty has proposed a constitutional amendment to put government on a diet and limit the outrageous spending increases that have our great state on a path to fiscal ruin, just like California.

Want proof? Since 1960, Minnesota's AVERAGE spending increase per every 2-year budget cycle has been a whopping 21%!

It's time for action!

The rally will be headlined by Congresswoman Michele Bachmann!

What: A rally in favor of limiting government spending

When: Monday, December 7th, 9:00 AM

Where: The Capitol rotunda

After the rally, the Governor's proposal will be heard in the Senate Tax Committee. All rally attendees are invited to head down to the hearing and observe their government in action.

So you have to work Monday? The Watchdog has no sympathy. This is your government and your obligation to stand against ruinous liberal spending. It's a good thing the Founding Fathers weren't too busy to create America. It's a good thing Americans weren't too busy to fight World War II. Take a couple hours off work and join the cause. You've probably taken time off for the dentist or vacation. Don't you think your freedom is just a bit more important?

Be there!

Details on this important event can be found [here](#).

SEX OFFENDER ALERT - ANOKA COUNTY.

Perverts are coming to a neighborhood near you! The Anoka County Sheriff reports that two level 3 sex offenders (the most likely to re-offend) will be moving into Ham Lake. State law requires that the public be given notice through a public meeting when these lowlifes are about to move in.

Both these clowns have been convicted of sexual activity with young children.

Ham Lake taxpayers can hear more about their two newest neighbors at the public hearing, which will be held at McKinley Elementary (how ironic) at 6:30 PM on Thursday, December 10th.

The Watchdog will happily pay for a one-way bus ticket to Mexico for both these guys. Ham Lake is a wonderful community that doesn't need to be polluted by convicted perverts. Hopefully, elected officials from the area will show up to register their disgust.

The Anoka County Union article on this subject can be found [here](#).

Want to find out if there are other perverts living in Anoka County, perhaps in your city? Search the sex offender database [here](#).

IF YOU THOUGHT NORTHSTAR RAIL WAS BAD...

Last week, we reported on the inauspicious opening of the Northstar rail train, the mass transit project that came in almost 100% overbudget and 50% shorter in distance. Northstar managed to shave a whole 2 minutes off the commute between Big Lake and Minneapolis, all for a measly \$317 million. Oh well, government has a bunch of extra money these days, right?

Now meet Northstar's ugly bridesmaid. The Dog has also reported multiple times on the proposed tourist train to Duluth. You remember this route as the one that was such a money loser Amtrak dumped it in 1985.

Now Anoka County and partners seek to resurrect it, apparently unaware that there's now a freeway called I-35 that carries people up to Duluth quickly, efficiently, cheaply, and conveniently. Anoka County also is apparently unaware that once a train dumps you off in Duluth there is no easy way to get around.

But that doesn't matter. It's all about hiring lobbyists, wining and dining, and visiting Washington, DC to act like a big shot.

Taxpayers got a giant dose of sticker shock this week when MnDOT estimated the cost of the line to be an obscene \$990 million dollars - more than 3 times the cost of Northstar!

The paid consultants had estimated the line to be some 2/3rds of that cost, \$615 million. Almost \$1 billion for a train to Duluth is simply obscene.

ANOKA COUNTY BUDGETS FOR PAY INCREASES.

Do you get the feelings that our cities, counties, and school boards don't get the fact that we're in the worst economy since the Great Depression? Do they understand that unemployment is in the double digits? Are they aware of the precipitous drop in wages that has never happened to this degree? Or maybe it's just that they don't care.

The Anoka County Board adopted a budget this week that reserves some \$765,000 for pay increases for employees. The Board adopted the budget on a 5-2 vote. As you can guess, our Iron Ladies Rhonda Sivarajah and Robyn West were once again valiant heroes of the taxpayer for speaking out against this foolishness. And once again, 5 commissioners who have been around way too long in government voted for the do-nothing, pretend-nothing-is-wrong bury-your-head-in-the-sand status quo. But then again, these are the same people pursuing a \$990 million tourist train.

TEACHERS IGNORE ECONOMIC REALITY.

Didn't we just write about local government ignoring the economic reality of this downturn? Since we're Minnesota's leading conservative news source, let us amaze you with some evidence of what we're talking about that no other media outlet will report.

Below are some teacher contract settlement amounts and the date the contract was settled. The price increase reflects the increase in the total cost of the contract, including wages and benefits

Brooklyn Center (7.06%) 9/14/09
Clinton-Graceville-Beardsley (5%) 10/21/09
Glencoe-silver Lake (5.86%) 6/29/09
Lanesboro (9.39%) 6/4/09
Littlefork-Big Falls (6.11%) 9/16/09
Minnetonka (5.4%) 10/1/09
Mounds View (6.91%) 9/22/09
Randolph (5.56%) 4/20/09
Rushford-Peterson (5.73%) 10/13/09
Swanville (5.7%) 10/13/09
Wayzata (6.8%) 9/14/09
Westonka (5.6%) 9/14/09

Yes, our under-funded public schools, indeed! At a time when many taxpayers have lost jobs and taken wage cuts, these public employees are enjoying increases to salaries and benefits. We need a levy!!!!

E-mail Update 12/14/09

In This Issue:

1. An Expensive Victory?
2. The Underachieving Train.
3. Fridley Voters Send a Message.
4. An Anti-Capitalist - BIG TIME.

AN EXPENSIVE VICTORY?

It looks like Coon Rapids taxpayers may have won a victory in their quest to stop a \$60 million publicly-subsidized community center. The Coon Rapids Herald reported on Friday that the results of the latest council work session has revealed that a majority of the council do not support building the community center at this time.

While the news is quite welcome for beleaguered property taxpayers, it's also troubling that only 4 of the 7 members (Schulte, Johnson, Larson, Sidoti) of the council feel that way. It's hard to believe there are 3 members of the council (Howe, Sanders, Klint) who believe in raising property taxes to support a community center that will compete with private business in providing identical services.

Moreover, it's shocking that these 3 would think this plan a good idea as property values plummet and unemployment continues to plague the economy. It's obvious that these 3 are interested more in empire building than they are in observing fiscal restraint. When the private economy is shrinking, city government has no business spending more money, especially on non-essential frivolity.

But taxpayers in the Rapids aren't in the clear. The Council will take a formal vote December 15th. The council could vote only for a new ice arena, the full community center, or a scaled back version of the community center that would cost over \$30 million.

What's also noteworthy is the sticker shock associated with the "arena only" option. The estimated cost of a new Cook Arena is a staggering \$9.7 million. Almost \$10 million for a youth hockey arena is an astounding amount of money. In fact, the City of Rogers just built a new facility for \$5.5 million. The city certainly owes taxpayers a rationale for a \$10 million ice rink.

What was really pathetic and laughable were the comments of Mayor Time Howe. Hizzoner, apparently eager to match Dan Erhart in the legacy project race, wants a community center he can attach to his name on those dumb plaques that adorn every ice rink, senior center, and library telling us which forgettable public officials were in office at the time the money was spent building the local version of the Pyramids of Ghiza.

Howe, alluding to what he considers to be the Founding Fathers, intoned, "Our forefathers took risks building athletic facilities like the golf course, the ice arena, and the soccer complex." Sure, Mayor, those council members were just like the Pilgrims, the Minutemen, and the brave men who gave birth to America. Was it a risk to sign the Declaration of Independence? Was it a risk to cross the frontier in a covered wagon? No, not really. The real risk was in building the soccer complex! What would America be today if not for the Coon Rapids soccer complex? Let the history books now reflect that the true founding period of America was between colonial times and the date the Coon Rapids soccer complex was built. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the soccer complex! USA! USA! USA!

Seriously, weigh in this issue and let the council know how you feel before they vote.

THE UNDERACHIEVING TRAIN

It's been quite a month for Minnesota's "newest star." Our intrepid choo choo has already failed in two significant ways as the Watchdog ponders the return on investment of \$317 million.

Last week, the little \$317 million that could, well, could not. An engine for our Newest Star broke down, leaving good ol' busses to come to the rescue of stranded commuters. No word on whether the engine at fault was the one Dan Erhart inspected on his junket to Idaho to inspect locomotives before delivery. You remember, the junket to Idaho to look at locomotives when they arrived in Anoka a few weeks later. But hey, there were some great ~~campaign~~ photos taken at taxpayer expense! (By the way, the Dog's favorite Erhart taxpayer-financed ~~campaign~~ piece is the one where the headline blares "ERHART VISITS RIVERDALE STATION" and the entire press release consists of a single sentence that tells us that Erhart received an update on the pedestrian bridge at the station).

We also learned this week that the choo choo has already, in the first month, failed to meet ridership goals. So far, the train has averaged 2,207 riders per day while the goal was 2,460. Of course, the failure to meet ridership goals was explained away by Metro Transit in part because of the Thanksgiving holiday. Say what? They didn't figure the holiday into their ridership goals? Lacking a calendar down at the shop? Puhleez. This is nothing more than yet another missed goal for Northstar. Just like the cost, just like the length of the route, just like the start date. Northstar has missed every major milestone from day one.

If ridership numbers don't pan out, Minnesota can look to Seattle. In Seattle, commuter rail officials simply published new, lower ridership goals after the Seattle Sounder failed to meet goals and then promptly declared success.

It looks like the Newest Star has already morphed into this.

FRIDLEY VOTERS SEND A MESSAGE

Fridley can hardly be called a conservative city. It's a city that regularly goes for DFL candidates by large margins, whether it's a national race, statewide race, or a local race. Fridley is represented in the Minnesota legislature by one of the most liberal, anti-capitalist politicians the Dog has ever seen (more on that below).

Thus, it's fairly remarkable to note that Fridley voters last week rejected an amendment to the city charter that would have made it easier for the city council to raise taxes and fees by a 3-2 margin.

The proposal would have allowed special elections to raise taxes and fees beyond the charter's limit of inflation up to 5%.

The people who favored the amendment know that special elections feature a low turnout where special interests can maximize their chances of slipping a tax increase past regular voters who tend to show up in greater numbers at general elections.

For now, it remains the law in Fridley that tax and fee increases beyond the charter limit must be voted upon at a general election.

Of course, there was a chorus of fear mongers who are now speaking of dire cuts to essential services now that the taxpayers have denied an easier route to their collective wallets. Not surprisingly, the charge is led by Mayor Scott Lund, who now threatens "significant" budget cuts. No problem, Scott. Just start with Springbrook Nature Center, which ought to be funded with private donations anyway. Last comes the police department. It's that simple.

What's even easier to understand than funding priorities is the need for government to tighten its belt, just like those who fund government have done.

Guess what, Mayor. The taxpayers of Fridley have faced some devastating cuts themselves in the form of layoffs and partial layoffs. The value of their homes has been cut. The value of their 401Ks has been cut. It's time for you and your highly paid city manager to get serious, truly serious, about trimming city expenses.

AN ANTI-CAPITALIST - BIG TIME

The fair city of Fridley is represented, in part, by Carolyn Laine in the Minnesota House. Representative Laine is certainly a friendly, diligent public servant and a whole league better than her predecessor, Barb Goodwin, who was essentially unfit for public service.

Consistent with this reputation, Rep. Laine accepted CEO Harold Hamilton's invitation to visit Micro Control Company's (MCC) global headquarters in Fridley recently. Hamilton offers a tour to every politician regardless of party affiliation. Numerous elected officials, including President Bush, have toured MCC over the years.

After a tour of MCC, Hamilton and Laine sat down for a discussion of taxes, the economy, and the business climate in Minnesota.

After explaining that MCC pays 49 cents of every dollar of revenue to the government in the form of taxes, Hamilton asked Laine about the fairness of this onerous rate of taxation. Furthermore, Laine was asked what she thought would be a fair amount of profit the owners of MCC should be allowed to keep.

Shockingly, Laine opined that MCC owners should only be allowed to keep enough profit to meet living expenses! Such an answer goes well beyond liberalism, well beyond socialism, and into the realm of Marxism. No politician, Mark Dayton, has ever been that blunt with Hamilton.

Again, consistent with her reputation, Rep. Laine gets kudos for her honesty and sincerity. Not many politicians would have the stones to be that blunt.

Yikes!

E-mail Update 12/21/09

In This Issue:

MERRY CHRISTMAS EDITION!

1. DFLer Punished for Opposing Tax Increases.
2. Minneapolis has Plenty of Money.
3. DFL Math.
4. Al Franken is a Jackass.

DFLer PUNISHED FOR OPPOSING TAX INCREASES.

State Representative Gene Pelowski (DFL - Winona) has attracted a DFL challenger for his legislative seat in District 31A.

That Pelowski has attracted a challenger from his own party is curious to say the least. Pelowski is a veteran legislator who by all accounts has served his district and his party well. Pelowski has been returned to the Capitol by his constituents 12 times in his legislative career and is highly respected around the Capitol as a thoughtful and talented public servant.

So why the challenge? Pelowski is apparently being punished for voting against the massive tax increases the DFL passed in the last legislative session that were vetoed by Governor Pawlenty. As a side note, it should be pointed out that Pelowski was hardly the only DFLer to oppose the multi-billion tax increases. In fact, the tax increase bill passed the House by the bare majority of 68 votes even though there are 87 DFLers in that body.

Pelowski also failed to vote to override Pawlenty's vetoes, voting with Republicans to uphold the veto.

Debbie White, The DFL challenger, said as much in an interview. Said White, "He undercuts the DFL Party in the legislature."

It appears the fix is in against Pelowski, as evidenced by one of Minnesota's largest public employee unions voting to endorse White. AFSCME has endorsed challenger White. In their press release, the union specifically noted Pelowski's failure to support massive tax increases as a reason for the White endorsement.

One of the real laughs in the press release was a statement from Eliot Seide, union clown-in-chief regarding Pelowski's seniority. Seide announced that one reason the union was opposing Pelowski was because he has been in office too long (24 years).

Really? The Watchdog looks forward to AFSCME then opposing the re-election efforts of the following DFL House members:

Lynn Carlson (38 years)
Phyllis Kahn (38 years)
Mary Murphy (34 years)
Karen Clark (30 years)
Loren Solberg (28 years)

We say the fix is in because the union apparently didn't even invite Pelowski to screen with them. Moreover, AFSCME endorsed White even before she announced her candidacy!

But here's the real reason the Watchdog brings this issue to light, as we're not real big fans of Pelowski. The real reason is the blatant hypocrisy of the media in this whole affair.

Remember the infamous "override six?" They were the six House Republicans who voted to override Governor Pawlenty's veto of a \$6.6 billion transportation tax increase.

When these six were held to account by their caucus and their party, the media engaged in feigned collective outrage, accusing the GOP of demanding "purity" and a blind adherence to party ideology. The Override Six were praised for their "courage" "independence" and willingness to "vote their conscience." To be blunt, the media martyred these six and used the vote to portray the GOP as a small tent party that demands lockstep votes from their endorsed legislators.

Where's the outrage now that a well-respected DFLer is being held to account in the same manner? Where are the Star Tribune OpEd pieces praising Rep. Pelowski's independence and bravery? Where are the editorials blasting the DFL for demanding blind adherence to a high-tax orthodoxy? You can bet your last dollar that if it was a Republican who voted FOR tax increases and FOR an override of a Pawlenty veto, that legislator would be put on a media pedestal, with the requisite homage paid by the usual suspects like Nick Coleman and Lori Sturdevant.

But since it's a DFLer and because the subject is tax increases, the media will do their liberal duty and turn a blind eye as the DFL and their union henchmen walk Gene Pelowski to the political gallows for committing the capital offense of opposing a multi-billion dollar tax increase and failing to toe the party orthodoxy of bigger government through ever bigger tax increases.

Hypocrites one and all.

MINNEAPOLIS HAS PLENTY OF MONEY.

There certainly has been an abundance of whining and a "can't do" attitude coming from Minnesota's cities and counties regarding local government aid (LGA) (we call it local government welfare) cuts coming from Saint Paul.

Consistent with that whining are the usual threats to cut the most sensitive and basic functions of local government like police, fire and snow plowing to create the appearance that local governments have "cut to the bone" and must raise taxes to protect the most basic services. Of course, this exercise is a bunch of hogwash as most cities and counties are outright lying about the state of their budgets. Most local governments simply don't want to adapt to the new economic reality and would prefer to keep the money spigot wide open, regardless of the financial situation of those who pay the taxes.

The Watchdog has spent much time exposing this charade through an examination of budgets in Red Wing, Coon Rapids, Mounds View, and other cities.

To be honest, this exercise is akin to fishing with dynamite, as the waste and bloat in government is omnipresent and easy to find. We really just occasionally pull out some darts and pitch them at a map of Minnesota to find our targets. Hours of basic research later, viola! We have uncovered waste and bloat!

Other times, we simply open the newspaper and have the bloat served up like a fat fastball right down the middle, ripe to knock out of the park.

Last Friday, the City of Minneapolis served up a meatball we will now blast into the upper deck and watch as loyal Watchdogs everywhere walk away disgusted and further convinced that government has a serious spending addiction.

The Star Tribune reported that the Minneapolis City Council voted to keep its car allowance, give itself a pay raise, and also raise the pay of mayor-cum-gubernatorial candidate RT Rybak.

For council members, they will be keeping a \$400 per month auto allowance, which, if all 13 claim the full amount, is \$62,400 annually

Council members will now earn \$78,394 annually while Rybak will earn \$102,993 as he does little more than raise property taxes, lay off cops, and run for governor.

The pay raise and automobile goodie package comes just days after the city bemoaned the "unavoidable" layoff of 25 police officers. The media dutifully bought into the city's sob story with the obligatory biography pieces of the soon to be laid off cops and what losing their badge would mean to them as well as solemn, self-righteous editorials announcing that Pawlenty would have blood on his hands because of local aid cuts that now meant fewer cops on the street.

What a bunch of pure, unadulterated arrogance for these council members to jack up property taxes, claim that government is as lean as can be, and then vote themselves a car allowance and a pay raise in the worst economy since the 1930s.

The good news for Watchdogs is that these clowns are their own worst enemies. Rest assured, the governor and the legislature (at least the Republicans) will remember these antics when it comes time to trim the state budget next year to erase a \$1.2 billion state budget deficit.

Local government aid will be first on the chopping block and the expected chorus of complaint will be met with cold indifference and the reply that any city with money for car allowances and pay raise certainly can make do with less LGA, or perhaps none at all.

Thanks, Minneapolis! Your pay raises will yield positive results for watchdogs way beyond the borders of your high-tax, high crime metropolis. We will all happily point to Minneapolis when we're asked to pony up more dough for "better government" as we say "no sale!"

DFL MATH

The folks leading state government down at the legislature gave the world a glimpse of their leadership prowess last week when two powerful DFL lawmakers unveiled their much ballyhooed plan to save General Assistance Medical Care (GAMC), one of three welfare health care programs the state runs.

For months, the DFL has proclaimed that saving this soon-to-be-bankrupt program is their top legislative priority.

If that's true, you would think they would have taken the time to make sure the math added up before they went public.

Weeks after the unveiling, no one seems to be able to add up the math. House DFL Rep. Tom Huntley claims the cost of the package is \$292 million while state DFL Senator Linda Berglin claims the package has a cost of \$221 million.

Oh well, what's \$71 million when it's taxpayer money? That's a drop in the bucket when you consider that our Democrat president and his buddies in Congress are racking up deficits in the billions.

One DFL staffer said it all when he noted, "These are fuzzy numbers right now."

Way to be right on top of things with a sharp pencil, DFLers!

AL FRANKEN IS A JACKASS

Let the Watchdog just come out and say what every normal Minnesotan is thinking, with the exception of the hard core lefties who actually think Franken and Keith Ellison provide quality leadership in Washington. Al Franken is a jackass.

Despite having taken office only a few short months ago, Franken has already proven beyond a shadow of a doubt that he lacks the temperament needed to serve in the U.S. Senate and is thus unfit for office.

The latest moment of shame erupted when Franken, presiding over the Senate floor, shut down Senator Joe Lieberman when Lieberman asked for a moment to extend his remarks, a courtesy that is granted on a regular basis.

Remember when Franken went postal on T. Boone Pickens at a Democrat fundraising luncheon over the long-forgotten Swift Boats ads?

How about Franken's meltdown over a column written by Tennessee senators Lamar Alexander and Bob Corker that took issue with a piece of Franken's legislation? Franken confronted Corker on the floor of the Senate, losing his temper, as usual.

That's not enough, you say? Then how about Angry Al's dissing of South Dakota Senator John Thune?

Oh, yeah. And there's also Franken's ranting and raving about Governor Pawlenty to state employees.

For a man who won his senate seat by 312 votes in a blue state in the best election for Democrats since Watergate, Franken sure talks a lot smack.

Moreover, the U.S. Senate places a great deal of emphasis on civility, cooperation, and seniority. A jackass who ranks last in seniority won't get much done for Minnesota.

Like Mark Dayton, this guy will be a one-termer and we can move on to someone who can at least serve without embarrassment.

Check out some more Al Franken "classics" right here.

E-mail Update 12/28/09

In This Issue:

SPECIAL EDITION: The Year in Review

So here we are, Watchdogs. The year end of another year and, in fact, the end of a decade. As this edition goes to press, the Watchdog staff contemplates our fifth year of journalistic excellence here in Anoka County. Starting out as a simple idea to put neighbors in touch with local government, the Anoka County Watchdog has grown into the area's most trusted source of political news and commentary. It has been an enjoyable and fulfilling ride for founder Harold Hamilton and the entire Watchdog staff. We look forward to 2010 and many more years of keeping government accountable.

Regarding politics, 2009 was a year of extreme highs and lows. The punishing economic downturn defined our political discourse and colored decisions made at every level of government. In Washington, Democrats ran up shocking and appalling budget deficits as they put into action their ideological belief that government is the solution to our economic problems.

The good news came in the form of a preview of the 2010 elections when both Virginia and New Jersey elected GOP governors and saw counties that had gone to Obama flip back to the GOP in a big, big way. The public plainly doesn't like what Obama and Pelosi are selling.

In Saint Paul, the DFL was no better, as they committed not one but two cardinal sins in dealing with the recession. First, they sat on their hands, refusing to even put forth meaningful ideas to solve the state's budget deficit, all the while pretending that tax increases weren't necessarily on the table.

Second, the DFL unveiled an 11th hour budget proposal that - shock the world - raised billions in taxes.

The good news is that Governor Pawlenty then faked the DFL out of their political jocks and resorted to a little-used budget tool called "unallotment" to slash spending and bring the budget into balance himself since the DFL majority couldn't bring themselves to work with him on solutions that didn't rely on taking more taxpayer money.

Here at the local level, the bad news was that Anoka County, the Anoka-Hennepin School District and most cities continued to govern as if there wasn't an economic crisis afoot. Pay raises, junkets, mega projects proposals, and all manner of big government behavior was on display throughout the year.

Again, there was good news as the taxpayers prevailed on many of these fronts as well.

It is within this framework that the Anoka County Watchdog reveals our top 5 local news stories of 2009 - the year that was. Below are the top 5 stories (in reverse order), the story we ran, and the date it appeared in the Dog.

Enjoy! We'll see you next year!

STORY #5: KEY AIR LOSES RUNWAY EXPANSION

Key Air runs a facility at the Blaine

This item ran on 5/29/09:

The Blaine City Council recently expressed its collective intent to formally oppose any runway expansion at the Blaine Regional Airport.

Last Thursday, the Council directed staff to craft a formal resolution of opposition to be considered at the June 4th Council meeting.

The news was met with cheers from concerned citizens who packed the Council chambers.

The news was yet another victory for taxpayers who united to fight the expansion ever since learning that Anoka County attempted to ram through a resolution of support without following the County's own committee process or holding public hearings. This is yet another example of the County copping an arrogant attitude towards the very people it serves. What Dan Erhart and crew don't realize is that the County lost credibility with the citizens a long time ago and is now reaping the bitter harvest of mistrust and suspicion it so richly deserves.

Key Air, which has ties to the Good Ol' Boy network, has been seeking to add 1,000 feet to the length of the runway while increasing the wheel-weight capacity from 60,000 pounds to 95,000 pounds. These changes would allow larger, louder planes to use the airport.

Mayor Tom Ryan noted that the council has always supported that airport being classified as a "minor" airport. In fact, a November 1999 Council resolution states "The Council acknowledges that the Comprehensive Plan designates the airport as 'Minor', and the Council does not support upgrading the airport to 'Intermediate' status."

Council members Kolb and Bourke also raise their concerns with the Anoka County Board. Good idea, even though Sivarajah and West are the only two who care what taxpayers think.

Council member Clark also encouraged citizens to contact their state and federal representatives as well.

If Blaine formally adopts a resolution of opposition, it would join Lexington, Circle Pines, Lino Lakes, and Mounds View in opposing the runway expansion. Can Ham Lake be far behind?

It looks like the MetroNorth Chamber of Commerce is the only organization that has been receptive to the runway scheme.

You can thank the Blaine Council here.
Watchdogs can contact the County Board here.
State Rep. Tim Sanders can be reached here.
State Sen. Don Betzold can be reached here.
Congresswoman Michele Bachmann here.
Senator Amy Klobuchar here.

Get after it, Watchdogs! Key Air has paid lobbyists hard at work.

EDITOR'S NOTE: This item was based on eyewitness accounts and the article that appeared in the Anoka County Union, which is linked above.

Key Air withdrew its proposal in June, handing Watchdogs a huge victory.

Here's what we wrote on June 12:
Anoka County Watchdogs scored a major victory this week when Key Air withdrew its proposal to extend and improve a runaway at the Blaine Airport.

The effort, led by Concerned Citizens of the North Metro, is the second major victory scored by taxpayers in Anoka County, the first being the victory over the Vikings stadium.

The key to victory was a sophisticated grassroots effort that was organized early. Early organization is imperative because government is always better funded and thus has the ability to disseminate propaganda that will be perceived as truth if a counter-message isn't offered at the outset. Watchdogs learned this lesson the hard way over Northstar rail. By the time the opposition coalesced, it was too late.

Of course, eternal vigilance is the price of freedom. This issue, like the Vikings, could remerge at any time. The battle was won today, but the war is far from over. Congratulations again to CCNM!

STORY #4: COON RAPIDS SHELVES PLANS FOR COMMUNITY CENTER

The city council began publicly floating a early in 2009 to build a \$60 million community center that would need large public subsidies, necessitating property tax increases.

The plan developed over the course of the year, resulting in numerous public hearings and work shops.

A citizens group opposing the community center quickly mobilized under the guidance of Kris Olson, now a candidate for state representative.

The city council decided late in the year to shelve the community center plan and instead build a new ice arena, at a lower cost of \$9.6 million.

Here's what we wrote in our December 14th update:

It looks like Coon Rapids taxpayers may have won a victory in their quest to stop a \$60 million publicly-subsidized community center. The Coon Rapids Herald reported on Friday that the results of the latest council work session has revealed that a majority of the council do not support building the community center at this time.

While the news is quite welcome for beleaguered property taxpayers, it's also troubling that only 4 of the 7 members (Schulte, Johnson, Larson, Sidoti) of the council feel that way. It's hard to believe there are 3 members of the council (Howe, Sanders, Klint) who believe in raising property taxes to support a community center that will compete with private business in providing identical services.

Moreover, it's shocking that these 3 would think this plan a good idea as property values plummet and unemployment continues to plague the economy. It's obvious that these 3 are interested more in empire building than they are in observing fiscal restraint. When the private economy is shrinking, city government has no business spending more money, especially on non-essential frivolity.

But taxpayers in the Rapids aren't in the clear. The Council will take a formal vote December 15th. The council could vote only for a new ice arena, the full community center, or a scaled back version of the community center that would cost over \$30 million.

What's also noteworthy is the sticker shock associated with the "arena only" option. The estimated cost of a new Cook Arena is a staggering \$9.7 million. Almost \$10 million for a youth hockey arena is an astounding amount of money. In fact, the City of Rogers just built a new facility for \$5.5 million. The city certainly owes taxpayers a rationale for a \$10 million ice rink.

What was really pathetic and laughable were the comments of Mayor Time Howe. Hizzoner, apparently eager to match Dan Erhart in the legacy project race, wants a community center he can attach to his name on those dumb plaques that adorn every ice rink, senior center, and library telling us which forgettable public officials were in office at the time the money was spent building the local version of the Pyramids of Ghiza.

Howe, alluding to what he considers to be the Founding Fathers, intoned, "Our forefathers took risks building athletic facilities like the golf course, the ice arena, and the soccer complex." Sure, Mayor, those council members were just like the Pilgrims,

the Minutemen, and the brave men who gave birth to America. Was it a risk to sign the Declaration of Independence? Was it a risk to cross the frontier in a covered wagon? No, not really. The real risk was in building the soccer complex! What would America be today if not for the Coon Rapids soccer complex? Let the history books now reflect that the true founding period of America was between colonial times and the date the Coon Rapids soccer complex was built. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the soccer complex! USA! USA! USA!

Seriously, weigh in this issue and let the council know how you feel before they vote.

STORY #3: NORTHSTAR FAILS RIGHT OUT OF THE GATE

The story of this \$317 million white elephant is well known to Watchdogs. In fact, it's this whole boondoggle that gave birth to the Watchdog.

In November, the trains started running and the problems were immediately revealed. First, MPR of all sources reported that its own van raced Northstar from Big Lake to downtown Minneapolis, seeing the train win by a mere two minutes. So much for speed.

Second, Northstar's first month ridership numbers were below estimates. Estimates that were low-balled to start with to give the train the appearance of success.

Finally, one of the locomotives broke down, stranding passengers.

Here's what we wrote on December 14th:

It's been quite a month for Minnesota's "newest star." Our intrepid choo choo has already failed in two significant ways as the Watchdog ponders the return on investment of \$317 million.

Last week, the little \$317 million that could, well, could not. An engine for our Newest Star broke down, leaving good ol' busses to come to the rescue of stranded commuters. No word on whether the engine at fault was the one Dan Erhart inspected on his junket to Idaho to inspect locomotives before delivery. You remember, the junket to Idaho to look at locomotives when they arrived in Anoka a few weeks later. But hey, there were some great ~~campaign~~ photos taken at taxpayer expense! (By the way, the Dog's favorite Erhart taxpayer-financed ~~campaign~~ piece is the one where the headline blares "ERHART VISITS RIVERDALE STATION" and the entire press release consists of a single sentence that tells us that Erhart received an update on the pedestrian bridge at the station).

We also learned this week that the choo choo has already, in the first month, failed to meet ridership goals. So far, the train has averaged 2,207 riders per day while the goal was 2,460. Of course, the failure to meet ridership goals was explained away by Metro Transit in part because of the Thanksgiving holiday. Say what? They didn't figure the holiday into their ridership goals? Lacking a calendar down at the shop? Puhleez. This

is nothing more than yet another missed goal for Northstar. Just like the cost, just like the length of the route, just like the start date. Northstar has missed every major milestone from day one.

If ridership numbers don't pan out, Minnesota can look to Seattle. In Seattle, commuter rail officials simply published new, lower ridership goals after the Seattle Sounder failed to meet goals and then promptly declared success.

It looks like the Newest Star has already morphed into this.

STORY #2: TINGELSTAD GETS HER KEY TO THE GOOD OL' BOY CLUB

In a vulgar display of political Good Ol' Boy power, Kathy Tingelstad checked out of the legislature and promptly plopped into her desk at Anoka County. Tingelstad's revolving door out of state government into county government was a stark reminder of everything that's wrong with our county government.

Here's what we said on 9/8/09:

Minnesota's political scene blew up this week when it was announced that former state Representative Kathy Tingelstad was hired as an employee lobbyist for Anoka County. Taxpayer's League of Minnesota Phil Krinkie wrote a column suggesting the hire was payback for Tingelstad's vote to override Governor Pawlenty's veto of a \$6.6 billion transportation tax increase. The charge drew an immediate counter-column from Anoka County Commissioner Dennis Berg. The Anoka County Union also weighed in with a lengthy article. The controversy even drew remarks from MN2020, Matt Entenza's liberal blog (which also serves as a rest home for laid off Star Tribune reporters).

As usual, the mainstream media and even our counterparts in the blogosphere have missed the point and done a poor job in examining this issue. As usual, the Watchdog has been far out in front of this issue and will use today's column to lay out the facts and provide a framework for you to decide whether or not there was any impropriety regarding her hiring by the County.

At the outset, it must be admitted that there is no direct evidence, no "smoking gun" to prove that the Tingelstad hire was a quid pro quo payback in exchange for Tingelstad's votes as a legislator. But that's not the end of the story. Because there may not be any direct evidence known at this time, it is still possible to examine the circumstantial evidence to see if there is a preponderance of evidence to suggest that her hire was, at the minimum, a reward for carrying the county's water at the Capitol.

That Tingelstad frequently did the County's bidding as a state legislator cannot be denied. In fact, Tingelstad played a central role in two high-profile issues strongly supported by the County: Northstar commuter rail and tax increases for transportation.

Tingelstad was Northstar rail's biggest cheerleader in the Minnesota House, where she served as the chief author of the Northstar legislation. In her role as chief author.

Tingelstad chose to side with Anoka County against the political party that helped her get and stay elected. The Minnesota GOP at every level from the state on down to her own local party unit adopted a formal position against Northstar rail. Tingelstad ignored their pleas and pushed for commuter rail until she was ultimately successful.

Of course, Tingelstad's legislative career will forever be defined by the role she played in 2008 in passing a transportation tax bill that raised taxes by billions. Tingelstad will long be remembered as one of the "override six," the six GOP House members who voted to override the governor's veto of the bill.

Anoka County had strongly lobbied for transportation tax increases. Watchdogs will remember that the legislature unsuccessfully attempted to override a veto of transportation tax increases in 2007, one year prior to the infamous and successful 2008 override vote. In 2007, Anoka County Commissioner Dan Erhart was allowed to roam the floor of the Minnesota House to personally lobby Anoka County legislators to override the governor when the override vote was under consideration in the waning moments of that session.

In sum, we know that Tingelstad took enormous political risks to help out Anoka County at the legislature. In fact, her vote to override the governor made it doubtful she would have received the GOP endorsement for re-election and contributed to her decision not to seek re-election.

In late March of 2008, shortly after the override vote, Tingelstad announced she would not seek re-election. According to an article in the Anoka County Union, Tingelstad chose not to run again because she was in need of a better paying job. Tingelstad was quoted as saying, "My focus for the next several years will be on paying college tuition costs for my sons," she said in her statement. "After 12 years in the Minnesota House of Representatives, my responsibility toward my sons' education means that the modest legislative salary prevents me from contributing to our family's financial well-being."

We know that in March of 2008, Tingelstad publicly announced that she was looking for work and was in need of money to cover college tuition costs.

Tingelstad's final term as a state legislator ended in early January of 2009 and her job search presumably began in earnest.

Through County sources, the Watchdog learned in mid-March of that year that Tingelstad had been hired by the County to work in their Public Health Department. To the Dog's knowledge, no other media outlet reported this news and the Watchdog once again scooped the Minnesota media establishment with our March 20 email update.

This hire was curious to say the least and raised a number of questions. First, the County never publicized the hire like they did for her hiring as a county lobbyist. A search of the County press release archives reveals no press release announcing the hire.

Second, there is nothing in Tingelstad's resume that would suggest she was an ideal candidate to hold a high-ranking position in the Public Health Department. She has no formal education, training, or professional experience in the field to speak of.

Was this job opening posted to the general public or was this another closed-door hire like the lobbyist position?

Moreover, sources within the County told an interesting story regarding the hire. Sources told the Watchdog that the County knew at this time that County lobbyist Lona Schreiber would retire that summer. According to these sources, some members of the County Board wanted to hire Tingelstad at that time as a lobbyist but ultimately held off because they didn't want to be seen hiring another employee lobbyist during a severe economic downturn while they were also publicly complaining about state aid cuts.

The sources went on to note that they were surprised when Tingelstad surfaced in the Public Health Department.

We know from this sequence that Tingelstad was hired by the County within weeks of her departure from the legislature and put in a high profile job that didn't appear to suit her skill set very well. We also know that the County did not publicize that hiring like they have for the lobbying job Tingelstad will assume.

Moreover, reliable sources told the Watchdog as far back as March that the County sought to hire Tingelstad as a lobbyist.

Given what we know and the timing of the lobbying hire, it appears that the Public Health job was little more than a soft landing for Tingelstad until the lobbying job formally opened and the County could her into the job.

The news that Tingelstad has been hired as an employee lobbyist touched off a public difference of opinion among County Board members.

Commissioners Rhonda Sivarajah and Robyn West both voted against the hire and decried the lack of transparency in the County's hiring process.

While both stated that they felt Tingelstad qualified, they were disappointed that the County did not publicly post the job opening and give other candidates an opportunity to be considered. Moreover, West remarked that she was not consulted regarding the hire and instead was simply told of the hire.

With unemployment at a high-water mark, why wouldn't the County post this job and cast a wide applicant net? One would think that given the inevitable controversy surrounding the hiring of Tingelstad, the County would have at least posted the job and gone through the pretence of a job search process to deflect the very charges they're

fighting today. Was it arrogance? Incompetence? Both? In any case, this is yet another example of a ham-handed effort by the Good Ol' Boys.

STORY #1: COON RAPIDS BUDGET

We chose the Coon Rapids city budget as the local story of the year because this story is emblematic of the biggest Anoka County political news story of the year. Namely, the refusal of local governments to get serious about the economic crisis facing the state and the nation. These local governments are simply unwilling to acknowledge that they must tighten their belts in these times, just like the taxpayers who fund them.

Here's our story from 9/14/09:

With the 2009 State Fair in the history books and the kids back in school, Watchdog thoughts turn to, among other things, the tax and spending plans of cities and counties. These local units of government are now making plans for their 2010 budgets, including property taxes.

Throughout the summer, the Watchdog has been examining the 2009 spending of local governmental units. Seeing how these folks have taxed and spent during the largest economic downturn since 1929 gives a window into the collective mindset of our local elected officials.

Today we take a look at Coon Rapids, one of Minnesota's largest cities and a current flashpoint regarding spending priorities as the city contemplates a community center that would add to the property tax burden while providing non-essential services that would compete with private businesses.

The Watchdog examined the city council's 2009 Annual Budget. Like other cities, Coon Rapids' adopted a number of questionable spending items for 2009.

Overall, city spending has been a trajectory that may not be sustainable over the long haul. Over the past ten years, city spending has increased by an average of nearly 5% per year. The 2009 budget represents a 2.7% spending increase over 2008. While a 2.7% increase may be seen as rather modest, the Watchdog wonders why spending increased at all when the citizens who are taxed to fund this spending were seeing decreases in their household and business budgets. While family budgets were shrinking in 2009, why was the government budget growing?

Moreover, why did the Coon Rapids budget expand by nearly 5% per year when the city wasn't growing at nearly that pace? In 2000, the city had 61,607 residents. In 2008, that number stood at 63,081. In 10 years, the city's population has increased about 2.5% total.

How about crime? In 2000, there were approximately 11,000 reported crimes in the city while in 2008 the number was 8,697.

In examining the budget, there were a number of areas where the city could have reduced spending or made other decisions to tighten the city's belt.

For example, the city lists 255 employees on the payroll yet states in the budget narrative that only 3 positions were eliminated. Really? The city could only find about 1% in position reductions? For many businesses located in Coon Rapids, eliminating only 1.2% of their workforce would have been a walk in the park.

No wonder that Coon Rapids, just like the state as a whole, lists government as a major employer. In fact, three of the 10 largest employers in the city are government:

1. Anoka-Hennepin Schools.
6. Anoka-Ramsey Community College.
10. City of Coon Rapids.

The Anoka-Hennepin Schools employ more people in Coon Rapids than the top 10 private employers combined!

The city council should set a goal to move the city out of the top 10 employers.

Of course, there is a litany of expenditures that beg the question of whether or not the spending is really necessary, especially in this economic climate.

- \$833,000 for professional and consulting services, presumably including community center planning.
- \$130,803 for dues and memberships.
- \$194,250 for travel and conferences. How about banning all non-essential travel? How about a one year suspension of conference attendance?
- \$460,000 (a 22% increase!) for fuel and utilities. Gas prices have fallen, not risen.
- \$153,000 for one bike trail extension and new signs for city parks. You couldn't wait one or two years for new park signs?
- \$115,000 for computer upgrades. Again, none of this spending could have been deferred?
- \$4,000 to promote "healthy lifestyles" to city employees. Is this ever a good expenditure? Goodness, Anoka County just received a multi-million dollar grant to browbeat everyone for eating at McDonald's.
- \$15,000 for arts performances. Does the city really need an arts commission?