

E-mail Update 1/4/10

In This Issue:

1. County Board Power Play.
2. Metro North Chamber at it Again.

COUNTY BOARD POWER PLAY

It's well known that the Anoka County Board has had a long tradition as the center of power in the Good Ol' Boys universe. Anyone inside or outside of government who isn't with the Good Ol' Boys is considered the enemy - even if those people happen to be members of the county board.

The taxpayers of the county got another dose of "business as usual" from the county board when the board took up consideration of the 2010 county legislative agenda, otherwise known as the county whine and complain list. The agenda is essentially the county's wish list and marching orders the county's two employee lobbyists who earn big bucks to roam the halls of the Capitol during the legislative session.

The agenda was developed through a committee process that included many meetings over many months to solicit input and feedback as the document was refined and vetted by staff and board members.

But lo and behold, when the agenda was presented to the entire board for consideration and adoption, four additional items magically appeared.

Commissioners West and Sivarajah moved to have two of the four new items voted on separately since they had not moved through the regular committee process.

All 5 remaining board members denied the request and the motion was defeated.

Even though it was obvious that the items would have been adopted by a majority anyway, these 5 commissioners denied their colleagues the professional courtesy of a procedural vote for separate consideration to those two items.

It's no wonder the board is so dysfunctional and has such a poor reputation in governmental circles. West and Sivarajah are equal members of the county board who have an election certificate just like the other 5. Their constituents, through these two, have a right to be heard. That the other 5 would engage in such a blatant lack of disrespect is unfortunately not surprising but will have consequences.

First, the fact that the package was not a product of unanimous support will be noted by legislators and the governor's office when lobbyists Steve Novak and Kathy Tingelstad come calling. The state is less likely to support local government requests that lack unanimous support.

Second, we know that Commissioner West has a tendency to be somewhat naïve when it comes to dealing with the Good Ol' Boys. Again, while the dysfunction is regrettable, hopefully she is learning that you just can't bargain or reason with the Boys. It's their way or the highway. West is a talented public servant and a good person. She, along with Sivarajah, has much to offer the citizens of Anoka County. There will come a day when voters will finally see the light and send to the courthouse at least two like-minded commissioners so they can act as a majority and put an end to the Dan Erhart-led circus.

Third, what an inauspicious yet expected start for Kathy Tingelstad. From the start, we all knew she was hired with the understanding that she was a lap dog for the Boys. After all, she was a lap dog even when she was a legislator who was supposed to be acting in the best interests of her constituents and not doing the bidding of Erhart and crew. That she would come forward with four last-minute agenda items (relating to choo choo trains, no less) is no surprise. A true public servant in her position would have worked with all 7 commissioners to produce a consensus agenda.

How typical.

METRO NORTH CHAMBER AT IT AGAIN

Everyone's favorite chamber of commerce is at it again. While Tom Snell is the titular head of the organization, we all know Dan Erhart and his merry band of pirates call the shots.

The chamber has an unfortunate history of supporting tax increases and big government programs, including school property tax increases, the Vikings stadium sales tax, Northstar rail and its attendant property taxes, and many, many more.

In a Watchdog exclusive, we have learned that the Chamber this week will consider a resolution to support the Duluth tourist train, called "Northern Lights Express (NLX)" by supporters.

Like other rail projects, NLX is incredibly expensive to build (\$845 million), operate (\$46 million each year), and offers minimal farebox recovery (21%). (EDITOR'S NOTE: The Watchdog will have an in-depth analysis of the NLX rail project next week.)

It is also interesting to note that this resolution was drafted long before the state released its rail plan, including an analysis of the NLX project. How did this resolution even get into draft form before the technical analysis was even released? Hopefully, those who consider the resolution will take time to examine the technical analysis before taking a vote.

Moreover, where did all the alleged economic benefits stated in the draft resolution come from? Certainly not any kind of objective analysis. More than likely, the "economic benefits" were concocted in some kind of study paid for by the very people

who want the train in the first place. If so, such biased information has no place in the draft resolution.

How such a project could be considered to be in the best interests of the small business members of the chamber defies comprehension. Then again, a good portion of chamber members are governmental organizations that fully support big government anyway. (The Watchdog has long called for the MetroNorth Chamber of Commerce to deny membership to governmental organizations, to no avail.)

Below is a copy of the proposed resolution:

DRAFT RESOLUTION
Northern Lights Express Passenger Rail Project

Whereas, the Metro North Chamber of Commerce recognizes adequate and improved transportation is key to economic stimulation and growth for Minnesota, and

Whereas, we have a long term future vision for our community as a vibrant area with multi-modal transportation options to provide cost effective alternatives for area businesses and employees, as well as senior citizens and students, and

Whereas, the Northern Lights Express Passenger Rail proposal would travel from Minneapolis to Duluth through the center of Anoka County in existing track right of way, with a prime station in Coon Rapids, and

Whereas, early studies indicate the project could stimulate \$2 billion in investments in the 155-mile corridor, including \$196-\$260 million in Coon Rapids, and

Whereas, the income benefit associated with Northern Lights Express is estimated to be \$11 billion over 30 years from the creation of 415 thousand personal years of work, and

Whereas, property value benefits are estimated at \$1.8 billion, and

Whereas, the project has already earned several million dollars in local, state and federal support, plus the distinct recognition by a national panel as one of the top eight corridors in the country worthy of immediate development, and

Whereas, up to 80 percent in federal funds may be available for construction and purchase of high speed locomotives and cars, currently estimated at \$615 million,

Therefore, be it resolved that the Metro North Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors supports the Northern Lights Express Passenger Rail Project.

Be it further resolved that the Metro North Chamber of Commerce supports the project's request to the 2010 Minnesota Legislature for \$13 million in bonding, which will be

invested to match \$52 million of federal funds to advance the project through many phases and into construction.

E-mail Update 1/11/10

In This Issue:

1. Teacher Union President Out of Touch.
2. Rep. Dittrich Tries to Fool Us - Again.

TEACHER UNION PRESIDENT OUT OF TOUCH

The Anoka-Hennepin School District has tentatively settled a new collective bargaining agreement with teachers in the district. Next week, the Watchdog will have a full, detailed analysis of the terms and conditions of the settlement. Today, we're pouring over contract and economic documents supplied by sources within the district and the union.

The focus this week is on the outrageous, asinine public comments of Sandra Skaar, the president of Anoka-Hennepin Education Minnesota (AHEM), the local affiliate of Education Minnesota, the behemoth teachers' union and largest special interest group in Minnesota politics.

Skaar's comments in the Coon Rapids Herald regarding the contract settlement and the working condition of teachers in general demonstrate just how out of touch and oblivious these public union fat cats are with respect to economic reality of the real world, where the wealth and jobs are created that fund school districts and teacher pay.

Skaar quote: "Teaching is not the easy job with long vacations that some people think it is." While the Watchdog readily admits that educating children well can be difficult for the teachers who truly care, the job indeed offers long vacations.

Fact: The Anoka-Hennepin School District contract calls for teachers to work 187 days per year. The average work year for folks in the real world is 260 days. The difference is a full 73 days per year that teachers don't work, which translates into 584 hours a year difference. Maybe Skaar thinks we're all stupid or that we never noticed, but we all know that teachers don't work in the summer. We all know the schools are closed and the kids are home. We all remember being kids and enjoying summer vacation. And for all of us toiling in the real world to pay the taxes that fund government, we're well aware that we're working in July while teachers are enjoying some R&R.

Skaar quote: "Think of attorneys or doctors...do they provide any free hours? Do they provide any free time? Of course not."

This is a hands down winner for dumbest quote of 2010, even though we've got another 11 months to go in 2010. Skaar's quote was referring to the union asking teachers to stop the "work to rule" program, where teachers don't lift a finger beyond what's precisely required of them by the contract with the school district. The idea is essentially to demonstrate how valuable teachers are by shortchanging the students the union claims to care about so much. (To see an example of what one teacher union

has advised its members to do under "work to rule" schemes, visit our web site and see for yourself what this stunt can do to learning and to children.)

Doctors and attorneys don't donate their professional time? That statement is ridiculous on its face and is proof positive that the government worker unions are completely out of touch with reality.

For example, Doctors without Borders is a non-profit organization that provides medical care in some of the poorest, most neglected corners of the world to people who are experiencing widespread health crises. Hey, Sandy, when Doctors without Borders treats civilian war refugees in Sudan, they don't charge for the service or demand an insurance card at the door. In fact, this group won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1999 for its humanitarian work.

Closer to home, the Watchdog knows of many doctors who volunteer their time to treat homeless veterans or regularly visit homeless shelters like the Union Gospel Mission to provide free care to those who lack health insurance.

Even attorneys, a much-maligned profession, have a strong commitment to provide free legal services in the name of charity. In fact, lawyers have a Latin term for this charity work, called "pro bono."

Most law firms have a requirement that their attorneys commit a defined percentage of their hours each year on a pro bono basis to the charitable cause of their choice. And while reasonable minds can differ regarding the merits of any particular cause, there can be no doubt that nearly every attorney in the country subscribes to the long-held and well-established tradition in the legal community of donating hours on a pro bono basis to individuals and organizations that cannot afford legal representation.

The harsh reality is that the union is a teacher's worst public relations enemy. While there are many, many talented and hard working teachers, they are done no favors when their union bosses publicly complain and argue that teachers suffer horrible working conditions that their generous salaries and gold-plated fringe benefits don't adequately address. That's a bunch of bull and the taxpayers know it.

If the union wants the public to sympathize with teachers, simply admit that teachers get a good salary and benefits package that they have earned. Claiming that teachers are a persecuted class that never gets the pay and benefits they deserve wins no sympathy. This is especially true when those benefits (summers off, defined benefit retirement, sweet health insurance) are nearly unheard of these days in the private sector.

It would also help if the union would stop fighting common sense reforms that would help students and also align the professional standards of teachers with those of the public sector. For example, the union should support moving teachers to a pay for performance standard instead of an old Soviet era pay grid that provides a pay raise for

each year a teacher manages to avoid being fired and is completely independent of results achieved in the classroom.

Attorneys, engineers, and other professionals don't get paid to work a set number of days and hours. They don't get automatic pay raises tied to a pay grid. They get paid to obtain positive results. Results that are objectively measured and ruthlessly enforced by a free market system that rewards good business practices with profits and punishes bad practices through bankruptcy. Student results can now be measured with objective metrics. A good start towards building respect for teaching as a profession starts with the union agreeing to work rules similar to what other professionals see in their jobs. And another thing. Stop the complaining.

REP. DITTRICH TRIES TO FOOL US - AGAIN

There must be some kind of race between state Representative Denise Dittrich (DFL - Champlin) and her seatmate Meli\$\$a Hortman (DFL - Brooklyn Park) to see who can write the most banal, cover-your-a** letters to the Anoka County Union describing themselves as "moderate" and, now that the economy has tanked on their watch, letters telling voters that jobs and the economy are their top concerns. They never miss a chance to tell us how important job creation is to them.

Dittrich won the race to the editor this week with a classic "I feel your pain" missive detailing the state's budget problems and reassuring us of her passionate and unwavering commitment to jobs.

Of course, the letter was still littered with DFL code speak that provides assurance to Dittrich's special interest constituents that she has really changed her stripes. The latest DFL code speak talks of "honest" budget solutions, which has replaced "revenue enhancements" as the new code for supporting tax increases on the rest of us.

Let's cut the crap, Denise. The Watchdog is here to predict that Dittrich will cast at least 10 significant anti-business votes this coming session. She will continue to talk one way to the folks back home in her Republican-leaning district while voting another way in Saint Paul. History has proven as much.

In fact, the Dog provided an in-depth analysis of her anti-business voting record as recently as August 24th, when Dittrich announced her co-chairmanship of the DFL "Small Business Caucus."

Here's what we said:

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).

If you're concerned about jobs Denise, stop raising taxes! It's that easy.

E-mail Update 1/18/10

In This Issue:

1. Duluth Train Even Worse than Northstar.
2. Local Legislators Demonstrate Priorities.
3. Dick Lang: King of Weed?

DULUTH TRAIN EVEN WORSE THAN NORTHSTAR.

The Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) has released the "Minnesota Comprehensive Statewide Freight and Passenger Rail Plan" document. The plan lays out a vision for a massively expensive, multi-billion passenger rail system across the state. Of course, there is no equally robust source for funding either the construction or the operating subsidies for this white elephant.

Let's take a close look at the proposed train line to Duluth, the same line that Amtrak abandoned in the 1980s because it was so unprofitable even that money-losing outfit couldn't stomach the losses.

It's also important to look at the objective data from the MnDOT report because the Duluth train cheerleaders commissioned a study of their own that, surprisingly (Sarc Marc), shows a much lower cost than MnDOT. The NLX cheerleaders used the TEMS Group to conduct their study.

THE CONCEPT

For the uninitiated, the Duluth train is officially known as "Northern Lights Express," or NLX for short. The NLX proposes to run passenger trains from the Twin Cities to Duluth via Coon Rapids, Cambridge, and the Casino at Hinkley, terminating in Duluth. The train would classify as High Speed Rail (HSR), moving at 110 miles per hour.

CAPITAL COSTS

The MnDOT plan estimates that it would cost over \$879 million to construct and upgrade rail lines, bridges, and the other infrastructure necessary to accommodate and support HSR.

The TEMS study projects capital costs of "only" \$560 million. Of course, their study leaves out a just a few details.

For example, the TEMS study omits the cost of buying the rights to use the tracks, which are owned by the railroads. The MnDOT study estimates the cost of trackage rights at just over \$206 million.

The TEMS study also ignores that MnDOT's conclusion that 5 bridges along the line will need to be replaced at a cost of \$76 million.

The TEMS study engages in the usual low-ball corner cutting that rail advocates have used for years, just like with Northstar rail.

Remember when the Fridley station was dumped from the Northstar plan because it knocked the whole plan out of tolerance regarding the Cost-Benefit Index? No problem. Just add the station later. And try to get one in Ramsey as well. Oh, yeah, we'll go for yet a second one in Coon Rapids as well.

This is precisely the problem with these rail projects. Egregiously expensive to begin with, the true costs are almost always masked, to be paid for later. After all, it provides the old "we've already built it, we may as well do the job right" excuse.

The same holds true for the Central Corridor Light Rail project from Saint Paul to Minneapolis. "Off book" costs like mitigation at the University of Minnesota and streetscape beautification in Saint Paul are added costs that are being carried off book to stay within cost-benefit guidelines.

The TEMS study does the same thing, minimizing costs to artificially puff up benefits.

OPERATING COSTS

MnDOT estimates that it will cost \$45.7 million in annual operating and maintenance costs (O&M).

MnDOT estimates that "farebox recovery" the amount of O&M costs paid by riders, is a pathetic 21%. Laughably, the NLX advocates claim in their propaganda that riders will cover 100% of O&M costs "within a few years." That's true as long as "few years" means sometime within the millennium.

21% of \$45.7 million is about \$9.6 million, meaning that taxpayers will have to fork over \$36 million per year to subsidize people who want a cheap ride to the casino or Duluth.

Remember, the state has absolutely no dedicating funding to subsidize passenger rail.

Let's break down the ridership numbers some more to offer a better picture of what these massive subsidies for each rider really mean.

The MnDOT study estimates 430,155 riders per year. That means that there will be capital costs of over \$2,000 for each rider. The operating subsidy per rider is \$83.82. It's about 150 miles to Duluth. Even at \$3 per gallon, you could drive round trip for about \$50.

More importantly, it costs \$34 to travel round trip on Greyhound between the two cities. In other words, the subsidy per rider is 60% more than the cost by bus.

The taxpayers could buy free bus tickets for each NLX rider and save millions. Moreover, the NLX train would provide taxpayer-subsidized competition against a private, taxpaying company.

In fact, NLX's 21% projected farebox recovery is lower than just about every other line in the MnDOT plan.

Take a look at these projected farebox recoveries for lines running from the Twin Cities:

Chicago: 118%

Saint Cloud: 70%

Eau Claire: 35%

Mankato: 29%

Rochester: 28%

Duluth : 21%

The Duluth train line is a loser. It is one of the worst performing lines in the MnDOT study, no matter what the cheerleaders tell you.

LOCAL LEGISLATORS DEMONSTRATE PRIORITIES.

This past week, legislators introduced bills they have authored for consideration in the upcoming session that begins on February 4th. Called "recess introductions," these bills are the first bills introduced for the session and are thus an indication of the priorities our legislators hold for the 2010 session. Let's take a look at what was introduced:

Jim Abeler (R-Anoka):

HF 2432, a bill to fund a Northstar station at the bankrupt Town Center project in Ramsey

Meli\$\$a Hortman (DFL Brooklyn Park):

HF 2558, funding another Northstar train station, this one at Foley Blvd.

HF 2553, funding repairs at the Coon Rapids Dam, a white elephant no one else wants.

Carolyn Laine (DFL Columbia Heights): HF 2523, funding the Springbrook Nature Center.

Paul Gardner (DFL-Lino Lakes):

HF 2512, a bill discouraging bottled water use in state offices. **NOMINEE FOR DUMB BILL OF THE YEAR!** We've included the hyperlink on this one. Please read it and tell Rep. Gardner what you think of his legislative priorities.

There you have it folks, a representative sample of what our legislators think important as we head into the 2010 legislative session.

Where are the bills to create jobs, lessen tax burdens, and put Minnesota on a path to prosperity in the global marketplace? Instead, we get all sorts of bills spending MORE money the state doesn't have or bills to further grow the size and power of government.

This crew just doesn't get it.

DICK LANG: KING OF WEED?

We were shocked this week when the headline in the Coon Rapids Herald blared, "Lang named county's new 'weed czar.'" The "Lang" in question is Anoka County Commissioner Dick Lang, but the "weed" in question was troubling. Was the county turning California on us and looking for a new source of revenue? Was Lang getting a head start on a new lifestyle before his rumored retirement from politics?

Further reading indicates that the "weed" in question here isn't the kind that induces munchies and makes the Simpsons even funnier. Instead, the "weed" is merely the noxious kind that harms agriculture and provides a nuisance for the rest of us.

Lang may want to call the Herald and ask for a corrected headline.

If Dan Erhart were the "weed czar" we can only imagine the county credit card bills for meals!

E-mail Update 1/25/10

In This Issue:

SPECIAL EDITION

ANOKA-HENNEPIN TEACHER CONTRACT BREAK DOWN

The Anoka-Hennepin School Board this week adopted a new two year collective bargaining agreement (CBA) with teachers in the district just days after teachers themselves ratified the agreement.

As you might expect, there wasn't much in the contract that resembled economic reality or a whole lot of fiscal restraint, despite the propaganda of both the union and the school board.

PAY

As Watchdog readers know, there are three ways teachers earn pay: steps, lanes, and cost-of-living wage adjustments (COLAs). Remember that teachers are paid on a 1940s economic grid that rewards teachers not for performance or results, but for years of service (steps) and the attainment of further college credits (lanes).

New teachers start in the upper-left corner of the grid. For every year they manage to avoid being fired, they move one step down in the lane, called a "step increase."

College credits obtained beyond a bachelor's degree in roughly 15 credit increments result in a teacher moving one lane horizontally across the grid, called a "lane change."

COLAs are a general increase that pumps up the entire grid, raising the pay amount on every square of the grid.

Essentially, the financial goal is to move the top left of the grid to the bottom right. For a pay grid example, [click here](#) and scroll to the bottom.

COLA

In fairness, the new CBA did not offer a cost of living increase. On the other hand, inflation is virtually nil, so a COLA wasn't warranted regardless of the district's finances. In any case, the Dog will give credit where it's due and acknowledge that a COLA was not included.

STEP INCREASE

Step increases are offered in the first year of the contract but not the second. This is problematic for three reasons.

First, a step increase is a pay increase for every teacher who managed to not get fired and will now get a step for sticking around for another year. In this economic

environment, teachers shouldn't be getting pay raises of any type. If teachers can't take a true pay freeze this contract cycle, when can they? In fact, a pay freeze would have been better than the pay cuts many taxpayers took this year.

Second, the step increase is effective the first year of the contract. The district had wanted to offer a step increase in the second year. The difference is that a step increase in the first year adds a cost to the contract in the second year as well. If you offer "Joe" a \$5 pay increase in year one, you also have to pay it in year two. Moving the step increase from year two to year one cost the district millions, no doubt.

Third, step increases offer pay increases that having nothing to do with results. If teachers want to be treated like professionals, they need to be paid like professionals. There isn't an accountant or engineer in the private sector who gets paid more simply for avoiding being fired for the year. They get paid for producing results. So should teachers.

LANE CHANGES

The contract offers lane changes in both years of the contract.

Q COMP

In an interesting side note, both the union and school board have agreed to begin negotiations to possibly join the state's "Q Comp" program. The program, initiated by Governor Pawlenty, is an alternative compensation program that pays teachers based on results.

While it would be great for Anoka-Hennepin to join Q Comp, this pay system does NOT replace the traditional Soviet industrial pay grid but augments it.

We'll see what happens.

So let's calculate the possible pay increase a teacher could see under this contract.

Let's assume a mid-career teacher who is on step 11 and has a bachelor's degree plus 60 additional credits. The current salary is \$53,916.

Let's assume the teacher gets enough credits to earn a master's degree in the first year of the contract.

The step increase in year one: \$57,690.

Lane change in year one: \$61,250

Let's next assume the teacher add another 15 credits beyond the master's degree in year two, which then qualifies the teacher for a lane change. New salary: \$63,045.

Old salary: \$53,916

New salary: \$63,045

The new salary is a roughly 15% pay increase under the new contract.

HEALTH AND DENTAL BENEFITS

The district will eat the entire cost of health and dental insurance cost increases. Teachers will see no out of pocket increases. This isn't how insurance benefits work in the real world, where employees not only share in the cost of increases, many companies offer benefits different from a traditional benefit set. Health care savings accounts (HSAs) are a prime example.

For employees who elect "single" coverage, the district pays 100% of the premiums.

For those who elect "family" coverage, the district will contribute \$932 a month towards premiums. The old number was \$870. Again, the district agreed to eat the entire cost increase.

WORK DAY

The contract continues to pay teachers to work 187 days each year. The normal work year for the rest of us is 260 days, some 73 days longer.

TOTAL COST

We don't know what the total increased cost of the contract is because districts aren't required to report them. We do monitor sites that report settlement numbers. We'll continue to monitor the situation and see if Anoka-Hennepin reports the entire cost of the new contract.

JANUARY DEADLINE NEEDS TO GO

State law currently levies a financial penalty against school districts that don't settle their teacher contracts by January 15th. For Anoka-Hennepin, the penalty would have amounted to roughly \$1 million.

This deadline all too often pressures districts to agree to contracts they know they can't afford. The deadline needs to go.

In fact, it's high time to pass a law that says that districts can't settle contracts they can't afford. School boards are often controlled by the teacher unions who were instrumental in getting many school board members elected. The fox is often guarding the hen house in contract negotiations.

It's high time to limit contracts to costs the district can afford. This avoids the typical pattern where districts agree to expensive contracts and then cry that they need a levy because "the state" under-funded education. Bunk!

While teachers aren't rich by any means, they're getting a deal that taxpayers can no longer afford.

E-mail Update 2/1/10

In This Issue:

1. The Legislature is Back in Session.
2. Tobacco Tax vs. Fetal Pain.
3. The curious case of Rep. Dean Urdahl.
4. Senate GOP is Back!

EDITOR'S NOTE: GOP Precinct Caucus Night is February 2nd! Find your precinct [here](#).

THE LEGISLATURE IS BACK IN SESSION

On Thursday afternoon, to be precise. The session promises to be a real barnburner and, as usual, the Watchdog will be on hand to provide blow-by-blow coverage and analysis until "sine die" adjournment on May 18th (Do you really think they will get out earlier?).

The Issues.

Here are the top 3 issues the Dog will be following this session:

1. The Deficit. Minnesota is facing a \$1.2 billion budget deficit. Governor Pawlenty has vowed to make the state live within its means and has promised to veto any tax increases that reach his desk.

This is a daunting task with the legislature dominated by tax-and-spend Democrats who are beholden to numerous special interest groups who feed at the public trough and would rather see Minnesota go the way of California rather than balance the budget in a meaningful way.

The real challenge regarding TPaw's vetoes is upholding them against an override vote. The DFL has a veto-proof majority in the Senate and only needs 3 Republicans to defect in the House. House Minority Kurt Zellers will be judged solely on his ability to hold this razor-thin line throughout a session that will see true budget reductions that will truly reform the role of state government in our lives (which is a very good thing).

We know how this story will go. The Governor will lay out his budget cutting plan. The DFL will spend months grandstanding and beating on the governor. The DFL will equivocate and evade regarding their desire to raise taxes. The last few days of session, the DFL will pass their tax increase. The Governor will veto. The House will uphold the veto. Pawlenty will then be the adult in the room and balance the budget via unallotment. The DFL will be privately relieved that Pawlenty did all the heavy lifting.

2. Bonding Bill.

This is the year that the state considers a large "omnibus" capital investments bill that issues bonds to build and maintain capital governmental infrastructure like bridges, prisons, and college buildings.

Governor Pawlenty has already offered his bill, a modest one that invests in core governmental functions like roads and bridges and an expansion of the sexual predator facility at Moose Lake.

While TPaw believes there is a need to make some strategic investments in public safety, higher education, and roads/bridges, he does not share the DFL's view that this is some type of "jobs" bill. The federal stimulus bills have done nothing to improve employments rates. Nor will this bonding bill.

Look for the DFL to put forth a \$1 billion plus bill filled with local ear marks and pork. If that happens, look for Pawlenty to veto the bill, rather than use line-item veto authority to strike spending provisions within the bill.

3. Gubernatorial Politics.

Right now, three Republicans and five DFLers who are in the legislature are also running for governor, including House Speaker Margaret Kelliher. No reader should underestimate how the political ambitions of these 8 will influence the legislative dynamic.

This is especially true on the DFL side, where the hopefuls all wield committee chair gavels and are in a powerful position to either move or kill legislation.

These chairs and the Speaker will all feel the tension of moving to the left to impress liberal DFL delegates while trying to maintain a veneer of moderate governing to mollify independent voters who have become downright horrified by the liberal monster they helped create in Washington, D.C.

TOBACCO TAX VS. FETAL PAIN

The race for the GOP endorsement for governor has become a two man race between state Reps. Tom Emmer (Delano) and Marty Seifert (Marshall).

With precinct caucuses kicking off this week, it's to be expected that "hit pieces" and attack ads from both camps will begin to flood delegate mailboxes and email "in" boxes.

One of the first attack issues to come from Emmer supporters concerns Seifert's vote for a tobacco tax (AKA "health impact fee"). This vote to increase the tobacco tax (we refuse to get caught up in the "tax" versus "fee" distinctions) happened in 2005 as a part of the final deal to end the partial government shutdown and balance the budget.

But that's not the whole story. The tobacco tax increase was inserted into the omnibus Health and Human Services finance bill. This bill also contained a key pro-life provision known as the "Unborn Child Pain Prevention Act." This provision was of high importance to the pro-life community.

The inclusion of both a tobacco tax and a key pro life put conservative legislators on the horns of a true dilemma.

Some chose to vote against the bill and thus cast an anti-tax but anti-life vote. Some chose to vote for the bill and cast a pro-life yet pro-tax increase vote.

Thus, those Republican activists who blast Seifert for choosing to cast a pro-life vote either don't understand the issue or choose to obfuscate the issue.

Conservative hero Congresswoman Michele Bachmann chose to vote in the same manner as Seifert. When her opponents for the Republican endorsement for Congress attacked her on the issue, Bachmann famously declared that she would vote pro-life at every turn.

(On a humorous side note, Bachmann employee Jack Tomczak blasted Seifert's vote on his Facebook page and then backtracked furiously after it was pointed out that his boss voted the same way.)

Will Emmer supporters in the Sixth District start demanding that someone attempt to wrest the GOP endorsement from Bachmann because of her vote "for" the tobacco tax?

The same holds true for 3rd District Congressman Erik Paulsen. Any Emmer supporters want to dump him from the GOP?

How about state Senator Mike Jungbauer, who has endorsed Emmer? He voted the same way in 2005. Will Emmer supporters in Senate District 48 attempt to oust him over this vote?

What's also a bit ironic is that Emmer supporters want to use this 2005 vote to portray Seifert as something less than a fiscal conservative. Yet a review of the 2005 Taxpayer's League of Minnesota scorecard shows Seifert had a better score than Emmer that year.

Finally, Emmer himself was in the House at the time yet did not cast a vote on the issue.

While these two quality candidates will certainly throw some elbows, this is probably an issue that Emmer's camp should avoid.

(Editor's Note: Harold Hamilton supports Marty Seifert for governor.)

THE CURIOUS CASE OF REP. DEAN URDAHL

State Representative

Dean Urdahl this week endorsed Tom Emmer for governor, leaving many Capitol insiders scratching their heads. Urdahl is a GOP moderate who sports a modest 58% lifetime score from the Taxpayer's League. Emmer's approach to cutting and slashing state government seems diametrically opposed to many of Urdahl's views, which include healthy LGA and school funding.

One can't help but wonder if Urdahl didn't offer the endorsement as some type of quid pro quo to satisfy the Tea Party crowd in his BPOU and stave off a potential challenge from a faction that has at times been unhappy with Urdahl's voting record.

It's important to remember that a major player in both the GOP and the "Liberty" movement is David Fitzsimmons, who hails from Urdahl's area. Fitzsimmons is the Chair of the 6th District GOP, Chair of the Republican Liberty Caucus, and campaign manager for Tom Emmer's gubernatorial campaign. In short, the Tea Party crowd wields a great deal of influence in Urdahl's district.

Was there a deal?

The Watchdog has contacted Rep. Urdahl for comment.

SENATE GOP IS BACK!

Congratulations to GOP Senate Minority Leader

Dave Senjem, who got his team off the special election shnide this week with a win in Senate District 26. It had been 5 years since his caucus had won a special.

More importantly, Senjem has assembled a crack staff leadership team that has both GOP insiders and Capitol observers talking about a major comeback for the Senate GOP in 2010.

First, he hired Michael Brodkorb as communications director. Brodkorb is also deputy chair of the Minnesota GOP.

Recently, long-time GOP operative Cullen Sheehan was hired as chief of staff.

In addition, the Watchdog can reveal that a third GOP superstar will be assisting the caucus. We have agreed to keep the name confidential at this time but when it's revealed, conservative activists will be pleased.

Senjem has assembled a team that is savvy, experienced, and most of all, committed to victory. These key hires send a powerful message that the Senate GOP is playing to win in 2010. They want the majority, not just the table scraps the DFL throws their way on occasion.

Congratulations to Senator Senjem!

E-mail Update 2/8/10

In This Issue:

1. DFL Bonding Boondoggle.
2. Precinct Caucus Wrap Up.
3. T-Paw to DFL: Don't Steal My Stuff.
4. Rep. Urdahl Responds.

EDITOR'S NOTE: We've received hundreds of requests for our always stylish, suave, debonair t-shirts. Please be patient as they're now on back order. Every request will be met. To get your free t-shirt, go [here](#).

DFL BONDING BOONDOGGLE

Watchdog readers are quite familiar with how the massive debt-financed "bonding" bill works. They also know the even-year legislative session is when the bill is considered by the legislature and the governor.

This week the legislature, dominated by the DFL, released the House and Senate versions of the bonding bill.

As you would expect, the bill is a \$1 billion collection of ear marks, pork, and goodies for the DFL's favorite constituencies.

Let's revisit both the reasons why a debt-financed bill isn't a good idea and the specific pork larded into the DFL versions of their respective bills.

First, the DFL makes the incredible claim that the bonding bill will "stimulate" the economy and put people to work. Please.

How has the Democrat stimulus bill out of the federal government worked out? We remember when it was claimed that the stimulus bill would keep unemployment below 8%. The White House celebrated this week when unemployment dropped to 9.7%. Wow.

The DFL doesn't understand that government spending doesn't create jobs. The government merely takes money out of the private economy and re-circulates it far more inefficiently than the markets ever would. Government money can temporarily put one man to work digging a hole and another to fill it, but it can't create a sustainable job.

Moreover, the DFL keeps braying on about low interest rates as a justification to enact a monstrous, \$1 billion bonding bill. Cheap money isn't free money. The state is facing an immediate \$1.2 billion deficit and a \$5 billion deficit in the next fiscal biennium. When you're flat broke, even cheap money is out of reach.

Third, the bonding bill is financed by debt. It's financed by the state selling debt on the open market just like Washington does. Haven't we had enough of this credit-card

mentality? Our children and grand children are handcuffed to a mountain of Chinese financed debt and we just keep digging and digging. Enough is enough.

Finally, this may be a technical point but it has significant bearing on the question of "shovel ready" projects. The DFL crows about the need for an early bonding bill to put people to work. Putting aside all other arguments for a moment, it is impossible to get projects out the door that quickly.

Remember that a bonding bill doesn't mean the state loads up a bag of money and walks out the door to hand it out. Bonds are financial instruments that are sold in the financial marketplace. They contracts, they are legal documents, and they are complex. In order to protect the state and ensure a smooth sale, a complex "due diligence" process is required to satisfy both the state and the marketplace that the bonds are what they purport to be. That process takes many weeks and means that even a bonding bill passed in February or March wouldn't be ready for market until early summer.

So what kind of "critical" projects are included in the DFL proposals? Sit down, grab an emesis pouch and read on.

- American Indian Learning Resource Center (\$6.7 million)
- Bike and hiking trails (\$39 million)
- Minnesota Zoo (\$32.5 million)
- Rochester volleyball center (\$4 million)
- Springbrook Nature Center (\$2 million)
- Wirth Park Winter Recreation (\$1 million)
- Minneapolis Sculpture Garden (\$2 million)
- Dakota County bicycle tunnel (\$344,000)
- Old Cedar Avenue bicycle bridge (\$2 million)
- Rock Island Park trail development (\$1 million)
- Potter Center for the Arts (\$7 million)
- African-American Cultural Center (\$840,000)
- Mankato Civic Center (\$14 million)
- Orchestra Hall (\$17 million)
- Rochester Civic Center (\$28 million)
- Saint Cloud Civic Center (\$15 million)
- Ordway Center (\$16 million)
- Asian-Pacific Cultural Center (\$7 million)
- Oliver Kelly historic farm (\$10 million)
- Moorehead sports complex (\$4 million)
- Ice arenas (\$2 million)
- Midtown Famers' Market (\$500,000)
- Como Zoo (\$11 million)
- Chatfield Arts Center (\$2.2 million)
- Arrowhead Sports Complex (\$3 million)
- Saint Paul Saints stadium design (\$250,000)

The DFL claims they understand the seriousness of the budget crisis. Their actions suggest otherwise.

PRECINCT CAUCUS WRAP UP

Republicans and Democrats held precinct caucuses last week with all political players eagerly awaiting the results of straw polls regarding caucus attendee favorites for governor.

While merely a non-binding "beauty contest," the straw ballot is nonetheless significant as a barometer for candidate strength and another talking point for the respective candidates as they attempt to distinguish themselves in the race to become endorsed at each party's state convention in April.

On the DFL side, Minneapolis Mayor R.T. Rybak won the poll and vaulted into immediate front-runner status.

Conversely, House Speaker Margaret Anderson Kelliher was the clear loser as the expectation was that she would win the poll. By losing to Rybak, Kelliher is now clearly behind and has lost the momentum.

The one caveat for Democrats is that Mark Dayton did not participate in the poll, with his name not even appearing on the ballot. Dayton is one of the top tier candidates (scary, huh?) and has vowed to go the DFL primary, bypassing the DFL endorsement process. Thus, the DFL's endorsed candidate will face formidable obstacles in even reaching the general election.

In addition to Dayton, DFLer Matt Entenza has also vowed to go to the primary election as well. As a kept man, Entenza has access to his wife's big bucks to fund a campaign. With both Dayton and Entenza, we have the prospect of two candidates spending millions neither one of them earned, which is how they would govern anyway.

On the Republican side, Marty Seifert won both literally and figuratively. The conventional wisdom was that Seifert needed a double-digit victory to retain clear front-runner status. Seifert won 50-39%. The results confirmed that this is really a two-man race, leaving us to wonder why the other candidates continue to run. In short, the results were pretty much as expected.

The real story of last week in the GOP race wasn't even the straw poll at all. The story instead centered on the money chase. Like it or not, a candidate needs cash and whole lot of it to win the governor's race. "Grass roots" doesn't cut it at this level. You need money for television and radio ads as well as the bucks needed to get around the state to meet the voters.

To that end, Tom Emmer reports a paltry \$19,154 cash on hand total. Any reasonable political observer of any political stripe would concede this is a shockingly low number. Many candidates for the legislature have more cash on hand than Emmer for Governor. The Seifert campaign reported more than \$130,000 cash on hand, over six times Emmer's amount.

View the reports here.

(Harold Hamilton has endorsed Marty Seifert for governor.)

T-PAW TO DFL: DON'T STEAL MY STUFF

Ah, those tricky Democrats! As if having buddies file lawsuits against the governor over his unallotments wasn't enough, they're now getting tricky by hiding language in their bills that either repeal or limit the governor's unallotment authority.

T-Paw quickly put the DFL on notice last week when he sent a letter to the DFL leadership threatening to veto any bill that reaches his desk that steals his unallotment powers.

The unallotment power is critical to the governor since the DFL has shown it is incapable of acting responsibly by putting a truly balanced budget on his desk. (No, a tax increase bill that passes the legislature in the very last hour of the legislative session doesn't count.)

This summer, the Governor will likely have to be the adult in the Capitol once again and unallot to balance the budget and erase the \$1.2 billion deficit. Can you really see Margaret Kelliher going to the DFL convention to face the liberal loony multitude after balancing the budget without job-killing tax increases? We've seen this movie before and we know how it's going to end.

REP. URDAHL RESPONDS

Last week, we reported that sources told us that state Representative Dean Urdahl (R-Grove City) agreed to endorse Tom Emmer for governor because Urdahl thought such an endorsement would appease conservative elements within his BPOU who were unhappy with his moderate voting record and might move to deny him re-endorsement. We asked Urdahl for a comment on his endorsement of Emmer. Here's what he said:

"The rumor is not true. I had many reasons to endorse Tom, the prime one being that he would make a good governor."

It will be interesting to see how Urdahl's voting record this session will match Emmer's. We'll be watching.

E-mail Update 2/15/10

In This Issue:

1. Shakeup in SD 49.
2. State of the State Wrap-up;
3. Budget Preview;

SHAKEUP IN SD 49

With the accelerated state convention schedule, Republican and DFL BPOU conventions kicked off this past weekend with some big surprises right out of the gate.

The Republican convention in Senate District 49 offered the first upset of the campaign season.

Veteran state Senator Debbie Johnson was soundly defeated in her re-endorsement effort by novice Michelle Benson.

Benson's win was nothing short of a stunning upset. Johnson was a well-known incumbent who had won the district in 2000, 2002, and 2006. Benson, sources tell the Watchdog, was a relatively unknown activist who launched her challenge just last week.

The David versus Goliath match up was on full display at the convention, with Benson offering giving her remarks with only her husband and two children standing behind her.

By contrast, Johnson was supported by state Representative Tom Hackbarth, Senate Minority Leader Dave Senjem, and state Representative and gubernatorial candidate Tom Emmer.

Remarkably, Benson nearly secured the necessary 60% for endorsement on the first ballot, garnering 105 votes of the needed 120 votes.

Benson won outright on the second ballot with 123 votes, putting an end to Johnson's career, as both candidates had pledged to honor the endorsement.

Outsiders may be tempted to chalk up Benson's victory as a Tea Party situation or to dismiss Benson as an angry fringe candidate. Local Republican activists say otherwise.

Many of the Republican insiders who spoke with the Watchdog say Johnson had long concerned them with her poor attendance record at the Senate and a poor campaign work ethic. (A review of the Senate journal confirms that Johnson has had an extremely poor attendance record. You can also check the Taxpayer's League of Minnesota scorecards see to multiple key votes Johnson missed.) Most of these activists were not concerned with Johnson's views regarding the issues of the day, although she doesn't exactly have a stellar pro-taxpayer voting record).

However, these insiders felt that Johnson was in danger of losing the seat because of poor fundraising, poor constituent services, and poor relations with the activists who make every campaign function with their volunteer efforts.

Benson's victory was also a bit of a loss for the politicians who attempted to influence the process by publicly supporting Johnson. This is most true for Tom Emmer, who had already lost the District 49 straw poll to Marty Seifert on Precinct Caucus night. Some delegates were irritated that Emmer inserted himself into the process while Seifert stepped back and remained neutral. Emmer, Senjem, and Hackbarth obviously don't represent the district. Conversely, prominent district activists like current Rep. Peggy Scott and former Reps. Chris DeLaForest and Kathy Tingelstad all remained neutral. Johnson took a gamble by asking three outsiders to vouch for her candidacy and it didn't work.

As a rookie candidate, Benson will have her work cut out for her. She can waste no time raising money, crafting a campaign plan and working to understand the issues.

STATE OF THE STATE WRAP-UP

"The people who best know how to create jobs are those who have actually done it."
- Governor Tim Pawlenty

Pawlenty delivered his final State of the State address on Thursday to a joint session of a Minnesota legislature dominated by Democrats who were obviously hostile to the thesis of his address - positioning the state for economic recovery by focusing on private-sector job creation.

Pawlenty minced no words in drawing a sharply defined contrast between the DFL idea for economic recovery and his idea regarding the same.

The Governor began by pointing out that high taxes kill jobs and put the state at a competitive disadvantage in a hyper-competitive global economy.

Of course, high taxes are driven the need to pay for insatiable big government programs. Perhaps the most telling statistic from the address was the fact that since 1960, state government spending in Minnesota has increased by 11% on average each and every year.

Thus, the key to lower taxes and job growth is reigning in government spending. To that end, Pawlenty renewed his call for a constitutional amendment to limit spending to the amount of revenues collected.

Right now, the state budgets only for PROJECTED EXPENDITURES, not for actual revenues. In other words, the state budgets what it HOPES to spend, not what it ACTUALLY collects.

Can you imagine any household or business running this way?

To put a finer point on this issue, take the following example of a household:

The Smith family has an income of \$60,000 per year. The family calculates that they have needs, wants, and desires of about \$70,000 that year.

Under government budgeting, the Smith household would have a \$10,000 budget "deficit" to make up. The media would duly report that the Smiths have a financial crisis that must be solved with a mix of tax increases and spending "cuts" to probably arrive at a budget somewhere about \$65,000.

If one member of the Smith household wanted to hold the line at \$60,000, the media would lambaste that member as "close minded" and "rigid."

In reality, most people would call the Smiths irresponsible to budget for anything beyond \$60,000. But that's what government does all the time.

Yet it's just as irresponsible for government to budget in this fashion as it is for any household.

Pawlenty's amendment would simply make the state budget in the same fashion as any home or business. In short, you budget for what you have, not what you hope to have if things turn out.

Pawlenty also called for making permanent property tax increase caps that are currently in place. This is a great idea since many local elected officials like to use state aid cuts as an excuse to raise property taxes. First, they act like they have no choice in the matter. They act as if cutting spending in their own budget is impossible.

Second, it is well-documented that many cities and counties raise property taxes far beyond what would be needed to make up for state aid cuts. If the state reduces aid \$100, many cities and counties will raise taxes \$150.

They can suck it up.

The heart of his job proposal was not spending restraint but tax cuts and credits for corporations and small businesses.

Unlike the Democrats, Pawlenty's plan acknowledges that true economic growth and job creation comes from tax cuts for job creators and not "stimulus" programs that simply take money out of the private economy and recycle it back through the public sector into programs selected by political favoritism and not the free market meritocracy.

Specifically, Pawlenty would cut the corporate tax rate 20% while also allowing businesses that file as individuals (called "pass through entities") to exclude 20% of their income from taxation.

Of course, Democrats will howl that this program will "cost" money by reducing taxes collected from business. First, this program doesn't "cost" anything because the money isn't government's to begin with. Money they never had isn't "money lost."

More importantly, Democrats refuse to recognize the dynamic effect of tax cuts for business. More money at the bottom line for a business means more money to hire workers (who then pay taxes), invest in equipment, and pass dividends to investors who then reinvest the proceeds into the economy.

You see, businesses don't pay taxes. Business taxes are paid by employees in the form of reduced wages and benefits. Business taxes are also paid by consumers in the form of higher prices. Finally, business taxes are paid by investors in the form of lower returns and dividends.

The key to job creation is lower taxes. Government "stimulus" programs may be able to put people to work temporarily, but they never create jobs. Government can pay one man to break a window and another to repair it, but no wealth or jobs are created.

Conversely, when taxes are cut for job creators, they do just that - they create jobs and thus create wealth and prosperity.

It's that damn simple.

BUDGET PREVIEW

The Governor will release the details of his supplemental budget today that presents a plan to solve the additional \$1.2 billion deficit that was forecast for the current budget cycle back in December.

The Watchdog has spoken with Capitol sources who have provided us with a brief preview of what will be unveiled.

Look for deep cuts to local government aid (LGA) programs. This is a good thing. This program has become nothing more than welfare for cities. Many don't need the money and use it supplement extras like swimming pools and golf courses. A deep cut in this program is a good way to force the reform that is needed at the local level.

There will also be very deep cuts to human services, another good thing. Frankly, Minnesota's welfare healthcare programs are wildly out of control and in need of reform. For example, Minnesota has three major welfare healthcare programs. 12 other states have two and the rest have only one. Pawlenty has proposed getting rid of the most expensive, GAMC, and going to two programs. You've seen the hue and cry

from liberals over this small measure of reform in a program that is absolutely killing taxpayers.

The other area slated for deep cuts are the bureaucracy across the board. To say the Leviathan that is state government needs to be whacked is an understatement. Look for cuts to be the deepest ever proposed to state government. This is a good step in the right direction. Pawlenty should follow up with reform of the out of control retirement benefits next.

Education will be spared cuts, which is unfortunate. Education is well in need of reform itself. To suggest there is no room to cut in this behemoth program is ludicrous. The Governor should have used this opportunity to force reform on the schools through reduced monies, just like LGA and human services.

Also, look for Pawlenty to use a major budget gimmick to account for the rest of the deficit not addressed by LGA and human services. We disagree.

E-mail Update 2/22/10

In This Issue:

1. Seifert Chooses Running Mate;
2. Senator Debbie Johnson follow-up;
3. GAMC Hysteria;
4. Getting Fat at the Governmental Buffet;
5. Bonding Bill Bullying.

SEIFERT CHOOSES RUNNING MATE

(Editor's Note: Harold Hamilton supports Marty Seifert for governor)

Republican gubernatorial hopeful Marty Seifert named his running mate this week and the name should be very familiar to every Watchdog - none other than our very own Anoka County commissioner Rhonda Sivarajah.

Any casual reader of our publication knows that we believe Commissioner Sivarajah to be a true hero of the taxpayer. She has stood up to the good Ol' Boys network here in the county on countless occasions. From Northstar rail to the Vikings stadium to hiring political cronies, Rhonda has displayed uncommon valor in fighting for limited government time and again.

We wish Rhonda the best of luck in this new political endeavor. The way we look at it, it's a win-win situation for Anoka County Watchdogs. If we lose her as county commissioner, it means we've gained a great lieutenant governor who will bring her well-known common sense and conservative values to Saint Paul. If the Seifert-Sivarajah ticket comes up short either during the endorsement process or the general election, Anoka County and its beleaguered taxpayers will keep our champion down at the county courthouse.

Hopefully Rhonda has a couple of understudies waiting in the wings should she be elected lieutenant governor. Goodness knows Good Ol' Boy Dan Erhart is out there recruiting a big-spending clone to replace a tough woman who has undoubtedly been a large thorn in Erhart's side, along with our other taxpayer hero Commissioner Robyn West.

SENATOR DEBBIE JOHNSON FOLLOW-UP

The Watchdog was the first to report last week that state Senator Debbie Johnson had lost the GOP endorsement in her district to newcomer Michelle Benson on the second ballot.

The after math of this endorsement race has been interesting to say the least. First, Johnson appeared to renege on her pledge to abide by the endorsement when she said it was but didn't say why. It's curious that the GOP endorsement was good enough for Johnson in 2000, 2002, and 2006 when she won it but it's somehow not good enough

now that she lost it. This is especially true in light of the emphasis she placed on the GOP endorsement and its importance in 2000 when she herself was challenged in a primary by Glen Hardin.

To be clear, the Watchdog founder Harold Hamilton has no preferred candidate in this contest. We offer this follow-up story, however, because anonymous Johnson supporters emailed us this week asking the Watchdog to investigate "skullduggery" and "insider" activity at the convention.

While we are always willing to investigate allegations of unethical or even illegal actions in the public and political realm, those allegations must be credible and substantive. Anonymous emails claiming "skullduggery" need to be further defined by specific examples and tangible evidence.

As mentioned in our report last week, the delegates with whom we spoke thought the endorsement process was fair and above board. To us, it appears that the delegates were simply ready for a change, which is their prerogative.

GAMC HYSTERIA

There was an odd vote this week in the Minnesota House to preserve general assistance medical care (GAMC), an ultra-expensive welfare healthcare program that Governor Pawlenty has slated for closure on April 1st.

The vote was odd because many House Republicans voted for it. Again, this program's costs were skyrocketing out of control, with double-digit growth rates every budget cycle. This program was on a trajectory to eat funding from every other program area, including K-12 education and law enforcement.

The bill that passed last week came at a cost of \$283 million and would do nothing to reform eligibility and benefit sets - the very thing driving costs. Perhaps the DFL majority should first tell taxpayers how they intend to close a \$1.2 billion deficit before passing bills that spend hundreds of millions of dollars. Let them first show their tax increase proposals and at least give us an idea of how deeply they want to punish success and productivity.

Moreover, the arguments from the DFL were filled with the typical vapid, illogical appeals to emotion that seem fill their rhetoric. They spoke of veterans and the elderly being "kicked off" health care. As you would expect, the facts are just a bit different.

First, no one is being kicked off health care. Current enrollees will be auto-enrolled in another health care program that admittedly has a less generous benefits set. That's the point. We can't afford GAMC.

Second, veterans and the elderly don't use GAMC, or at least they have other alternatives. The elderly are already covered by Medicare, a strictly federal program.

Veterans are covered by VA medical benefits. One veteran actually testified in committee that he's on GAMC because the clinics under that program are more convenient than the clinic availability offered under VA benefits. Again, we can't afford this type of "convenience."

The DFL simply ought to get to the business of balancing the state's finances before taking up spending bills like this one and the \$1 billion bonding bill, which should be more accurately called the "debt bill."

GETTING FAT AT THE GOVERNMENTAL BUFFET

The Star Tribune ran an excellent article this morning that explained how government spending gets out of control and how the red tape and byzantine rules mask accountability and promote poor spending decisions.

The crux of the article notes the many different dedicated funds across state government as well as pots of federal money that allow the hungry mouths of government to feed at a bloated trough even though we have apparently cut government so deeply that tax increases are necessary - Puhleeese.

It's first important to note as a general proposition that dedicated funding accounts are bad public policy. They are set up by special interest group to fence off funds for their group and prevent elected officials from setting priorities and then funding those priorities from one pot of undesignated money.

It is illustrative to note that the state general fund will spend out \$34 billion this budget cycle. When all the other dedicated funds are thrown in, the state spends nearly TWICE that amount. These dedicated funds are larger than most people know.

The upshot is that in one hearing room, you have legislators cutting core functions like public safety while in another hearing room they are doling out big money for bike trails and zoos. Legislators have no ability to tap dedicated funds

These perverse results are on full display in the article. Take the Chatfield Potter Center for the Arts, a project recently singled out by Governor Pawlenty for its lack of merit and tenuous connection to any core governmental function.

Chatfield snagged nearly \$7,000 from Legacy Amendment funds (funded by the 3/8ths increase in the sales tax voters put into the state constitution in November 2008). Chatfield also has a \$7 million request in the bonding bill. According to the article, Chatfield may then return to the Legacy funding group for another \$50,000.

The rat race through the money maze gets even more complex with respect to outdoor amenities like parks, trails and natural areas. These types of projects are also eligible for monies from the Legislative Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR), which

is another pot of money dedicated to the environment. The LCCMR monies come from a portion of state lottery proceeds.

Take the example of native prairie restoration. These prairies are poised to collect \$1.75 million from the LCCMR, \$1.3 million from the Legacy fund, and perhaps millions more from the bonding bill.

You want to know why our government is flat broke? Because we spend money in this manner!

BONDING BILL BULLYING

Have you been disgusted with the way Democrats have run Washington? Of course you're nauseous regarding the spending, but are you also troubled by the lack of transparency, the lack of integrity, and the lack of bi-partisanship?

If so, the Democrats in Minnesota are no different. The Watchdog has already pointed out the bloated and wasteful spending in the so-called bonding bill, but you probably haven't heard much about *how* the bill was crafted and processed.

First, the DFL wrote the bill behind closed doors and rammed it through the committee process with no chance for GOP input.

The DFL next pushed the bill off the floor of both houses using strong arm tactics that prevented debate, the very lifeblood of deliberative bodies. In fact, the House DFL employed the rarely used tactic of "calling the question" to cut off debate and move directly to a final vote. (See a video [here](#)).

A conference committee has been called to reconcile differences between the two versions. As this issue goes to press, the bill has been negotiated behind closed doors between the House and Senate DFL members of the conference committee, with the public, the GOP, and the Governor's office shut out of the process.

Since when is it acceptable for a committee to meet behind closed doors, beyond the scrutiny of the public? Since when do legislative committees meet on a Sunday night after most citizens and the press have all gone home? Deciding legislation in a backroom with only the power brokers present harkens back to a darker, more corrupt era of Minnesota DFL politics. Unfortunately, the behavior also reminds of present day Washington, DC under Reid and Pelosi.

Shame on all of them.

E-mail Update 3/1/10

In This Issue:

1. DFL Smear Letter.
2. Kudos to Jim Abeler;
3. Tom "Tommie the Commie" Snell is Busted;

EDITOR'S NOTE: IMPORTANT VOTE TODAY!

Watchdogs, the Minnesota House will be taking up a very important vote today. Liberal DFL Speaker Margaret Kelliher has promised to call up a vote to override Governor Pawlenty's veto of a bill that would have continued a welfare healthcare program called "GAMC" that has spiraled out of control, growing by 20-30% every budget cycle.

The DFL is attempting to keep the program alive with only meager "reforms" while continuing to offer no way to pay for this expensive, overly-generous program even though the state is facing a \$1.2 billion deficit, thanks in part to programs like GAMC that are eating the state budget alive.

Contact your legislator today and let them know you expect them to uphold Pawlenty's veto so we can get state spending under control!

DFL SMEAR LETTER

Well, it didn't take long for the local DFL to show their true colors by launching a smear campaign against Michelle Benson, the newly endorsed candidate for state Senate in District 49 (Andover, Ham Lake, and Coon Rapids).

In a letter to the editor published in the Anoka County Union, local DFL chairman Mel Aanerud sullied his reputation by penning an unsubstantiated attack on Benson that was long on emotion and short on the facts.

Aanerud attacks Benson by noting that she "is REPORTED to be more extremely right wing and whose only contribution to the public to date is in the partisanship political realm."

Reported? Where? Is the best the local DFL can do against Republicans is level attacks based on guesswork? Aanerud could have done a bit of homework and at least checked Benson's web site to then criticize her for the usual things DFLers hate about Republicans: pro-life, pro Second Amendment, pro-national security, pro-business, Pro-freedom, etc. You know, that old chestnut.

Moreover, doing a little bit of homework would have shown the letter writer that Benson has an excellent record of community service, including volunteer stints with the Cub Scouts and the board of directors for Way of the Shepherd School. Apparently, the DFL

doesn't value this type of work unless it is done in the name of some government program. Perhaps if Benson had volunteered with ACORN Aanerud would have been satisfied.

It shows readers just how extreme the Party of Pelosi and Obama has become when they resort to these types of attacks. They never argue the facts but instead engage in personal attacks.

We should also point out the poor penmanship displayed in the letter. Apparently writing a cogent letter isn't a strong point with these people.

For example, earlier in the letter, it is noted that current GOP state Senator Debbie Johnson is "centrist" (never mind the years that these same DFLers spent years calling Johnson "extreme" in her own right). Then, it is written that Benson is "more extreme" than Johnson. Which is it? Is Johnson "centrist" or "extreme?" You can't have it both ways, Mel.

We'll leave it to our readers to decipher what exactly "partisanship political realm" means.

In addition, Aanerud couldn't help but conclude by pointing out that their endorsed candidates are centrist, moderate, solution-oriented servants of the public good.

While the DFL apparently can't even find a warm body to run against state Rep. Peggy Scott in 49A (Andover and Ham Lake), the letter did point out the "moderate" credentials of current District 49B (Coon Rapids) state Rep. Jerry Newton.

While the Dog has always found Newton to be a heck of a nice guy, he's no moderate. In his first year at the Capitol last year, Newton earned a perfect score of "zero" from the Taxpayer's League for his consistent votes in favor of more government and more taxation.

We would also point out that Newton doesn't vote with his district on social issues either. This past week, an amendment was voted upon in the Minnesota House that would have outlawed taxpayer financed abortions in one of Minnesota's welfare healthcare programs. Newton provided a crucial vote against the amendment, which failed on a 67-67 tie vote (see page 7864).

Coon Rapids is a pro-life area, with many citizens on both sides of the political aisle opposing abortion, especially taxpayer-financed abortions. Newton will have a great deal to explain to his constituents this fall regarding his vote to make them pay for someone else's abortion.

KUDOS TO JIM ABELER

Because the Watchdog is Anoka County's premier outlet for fair and objective news and commentary, we are never afraid to give credit where it is due.

While we have taken state Rep. Jim Abeler to task on several occasions for his voting record, we also want to give him some credit for his recent comments regarding upholding Governor Pawlenty's veto of the general assistance medical care (GAMC) welfare healthcare bill.

Abeler spoke on the House floor this week to publicly announce that he will be voting to uphold the governor's veto of a bill that extended this massive, out-of-control program without sufficient reforms.

Unfortunately, Abeler had voted for the bill as it left the House floor, but his comments in support of the governor are welcome. Hopefully, divisive override votes are a thing of the past for Abeler and the entire House GOP.

TOM "TOMMIE THE COMMIE" IS BUSTED

MetroNorth Chamber of Commerce executive director Tom Snell is at it again, and we have video evidence!

Despite leading an organization that is ostensibly pro-business, Tom's liberal leanings have been known for many years, including the sobriquet referenced above that he earned during his college days at Augsburg.

We came across a video on the web site of DFL state Senate candidate Paul Meunier showing various endorsements for him as well as background video of a Meunier campaign rally.

If you watch closely, you can see Snell sitting in the audience, cheering on the DFL-endorsed Meunier.

While Tom certainly has the right as a private citizen to participate in the political process, he apparently didn't contemplate how this endorsement of a partisan candidate impacts the reputation of the Chamber.

This is especially true if the Chamber intends to endorse candidates again this election cycle through its political action committee.

The same can be said for Tom Newland, who is board chairman for the Chamber. He actually appears in the video, providing a direct endorsement of Meunier's candidacy.

Is Meunier more pro-business than Michelle Benson? The campaign this fall will answer the question. Both candidates could start by telling Watchdog readers where they stand on tax increases. We'll be happy to publish their answers.

E-mail Update 3/8/10

In This Issue:

1. Tom Snell: Political Strategist;
2. Michelle Benson Statement;
3. Northstar Rail: The Gift That Keeps on Taxing;
4. East Bethel has Lots of Money.

TOM SNELL: POLITICAL STRATEGIST

Last week, the Watchdog exposed MetroNorth Chamber of Commerce executive director Tom Snell participating in a DFL-endorsed candidate's campaign rally and called into question his impartiality as the head of an ostensibly non-partisan organization.

In a "me-thinks-he-doth-protest-too-much moment," Snell immediately contacted Watchdog HQ to demand that we print his alibi regarding the DFL campaign rally.

According to Snell, he's just feigning support for these candidates in an elaborate ruse to gain their trust and confidence should they be elected. Once in office, so the theory goes, these politicians will be under Snell's Rasputin-like powers of persuasion to do the Chamber's bidding and, ultimately, conquer the world and at least three other planets of our solar system. As far as we can tell, it's kind of like the Jedi mind trick except played on the entire Minnesota political establishment (and Maine as well, where Snell has a well-known infatuation for Senator Olympia Snowe).

Lest Ol' Tom think we have taken liberty with his words, we have below published his political warfare cum psychological operations manifesto for our readers to interpret for themselves:

I attend many political events for candidates from both political parties. Over the past year I have been at political events for both Republicans and Democrats. If Paul Meunier were to win the election it is important that the Chamber has a relationship with him. Also, I have never given him any financial or volunteer support.

Okay, so we had some fun at Snell's expense being a bit facetious with his remarks and taking them to a satirical level.

Having said that, it does make a larger and more serious point. If Snell is indeed attending fundraisers and campaign events in a bi-partisan manner, then he should prove it by naming the Republican events he has attended. Has he attended an event for Michelle Benson, the opponent of the candidate at the center of this story? How about GOP state representatives Peggy Scott, Tom Hackbarth, Tim Sanders, or Bob Dettmer? Michelle Bachmann?

Tom, we will hold a space open for next week's issue to highlight your support of Republican candidates.

Finally, Snell's email still does not excuse the outright endorsement of DFL-endorsed state Senate candidate Paul Meunier by MetroNorth Chamber board chairman Tom Newland. Yes, Newland has a right as a private citizen to participate in the political process. But that kind of high-profile participation has raised questions about the impartiality of the Chamber. It is no secret that the Chamber has a reputation of being little more than an extension of the Good Ol' Boys Network. Endorsements like Newland's do little to dispel that reputation.

MICHELLE BENSON STATEMENT

On a related note, we also extended an invitation in the last newsletter to both candidates for state Senate in District 49, Paul Meunier and Michelle Benson, to provide us with a statement regarding their views on Minnesota tax policy. We thought that since two high ranking members of our local chamber of commerce had attended a campaign rally for only one candidate, we should give some equal time for both to explain to readers where they stand on a subject that is important to both our readers and the small businesses that comprise a large portion of the Chamber's membership.

Paul Meunier did not respond to our invitation. Michelle Benson's statement is published below:

Begin Benson Statement:

Minnesota over-taxes businesses and individuals. High taxes are putting our business climate and way of life at risk.

Minnesota offers highly productive employees and a concentration of high tech resources. So why does the *Small Business & Entrepreneurship Council* rank Minnesota 43rd for small business survivability? Taxes and regulations. Our own Department of Employment and Economic Development acknowledges that Minnesota was 48th in new company formation in 2007. That's astounding! There is no doubt that high taxes discourage business formation.

If you are going to take the risk to start a business, why not build where you get to keep more of the rewards for which you work? South Dakota, Texas... more than 40 states have a better business tax climate than Minnesota. Corporations pay Minnesota taxes at a top rate of 9.8 % on top of federal tax rate of 35%. Small and mid-size businesses pay taxes through the owner's personal income taxes with a top rate of nearly 8% on top of their federal tax rate. To keep the businesses we have and encourage new businesses, we must reduce our top marginal tax rates.

Where will the money come from? Historically, cutting tax rates results in greater revenue because businesses stay and grow. The more businesses we have the more

taxes we collect. The more businesses we have, the more jobs we have. A paycheck is better than a welfare check. We need a friendlier tax code that encourages more business growth and therefore more jobs.

Reducing personal income tax rates also leaves more money with our working families. Because they work hard, they are careful with their spending. Families with more money in their pocket pay their mortgage, pay their utility bills, donate to charity, and meet the needs of their families. I don't believe that government can make the best choice of how to spend your hard earned money. I trust you to make good choices.

Did you know that Minnesota is one of the few states that taxes military pensions? Military retirees bring great skills to their new employers and a sense of service to the communities they join. We should encourage military retirees to live and work in Minnesota by exempting their pension from income taxation. They have given much, and have much more to give. Let's welcome them to Minnesota.

Reducing taxes will encourage businesses and individuals to make their home in Minnesota and make Minnesota a better place for all of us.

Michelle Benson
State Senate Candidate
www.michellebensonforsenate.com

For more information:
<http://www.sbecouncil.org/home/index.cfm>
http://www.positivelyminnesota.com/Data_Publications/Publications
End of Benson Statement

NORTHSTAR RAIL: THE GIFT THAT KEEPS ON TAXING

So you thought you were done paying for that expensive \$317 million train that provides nothing more than an expensive, heavily subsidized ride for a few commuters who want to live in the exurbs and work in Minneapolis?

Guess again. In addition to the \$317 million cost to build the rail line, there are the millions in operating subsidies required to keep the train running. After all, we can't expect those who use the train to actually pay their way. Not even close.

If you live in Anoka County, you get to pay operating subsidies through the additional sales tax we pay in the Metro that was instituted over Governor Pawlenty's veto thanks to Jim Abeler and Kathy Tingelstad.

In a brazen case of copycat taxation, Sherburne County is now looking for authorization from the legislature to institute a local sales tax in that county to help pay for its share of the Northstar operating subsidy.

According to the Saint Cloud Times, Sherburne County would like to institute the same sales tax rate as was passed for Anoka County and the Metro area.

Assistant county administrator Luci Botzek was quoted as saying their county was "left out" of the tax increase for the Metro and wants to be "treated the same way." Translated, this means "We want to tax the crap out of our citizens during a recession in the same way Anoka County abuses their taxpayers."

Hey, Luci. Anoka County isn't a unit of government you want to emulate if you at all give a rip about the people you represent.

It appears they don't give a rip at all. The article indicates that the county has no plans to let taxpayers vote on the sales tax increase if they get legislative approval. That's because they know what the outcome would be.

And don't forget this little fact about Northstar rail. It costs \$16.8 million to operate Northstar each year. Riders contribute only \$3.1 million of that cost, making for a farebox recovery of under 20%.

What a deal.

EAST BETHEL HAS LOTS OF MONEY

If you live in East Bethel, be comforted by the fact that your property taxes should stay at zero this year. Feel safe in the knowledge that the city has more than enough scratch to plow the roads, answer the fire calls, catch the criminals and even keep the youth athletic programs up and running.

Why? Because East Bethel has enough money to out and waste money hiring Good Ol' Boy Emeritus Elwyn Tinklenberg to lobby for them.

The city will pay Elwyn \$25,000 to help them fill out forms to ask for federal money for Highway 65 and some bike trails.

Wait a minute. Why is it that the city staff, especially the highly paid city administrator, can't fill out the forms?

It appears that the city administrator's role in this whole affair is to complain that Congresswoman Michele Bachmann won't put in some congressional earmarks for the city's bike trail applications.

Good for Bachmann. She understands that pork barrel earmarks are one of the reasons the country is flat broke.

It is obvious that East Bethel is acting like a typical governmental entity by reinforcing failure. This is Tinklenberg's second contract with the city. He had previously blown through \$7,000 of another contract and produced ZERO results.

If East Bethel has \$32,000 to blow on a lobbyist like Tinklenberg, they clearly have enough money to sustain core governmental functions like public safety.

E-mail Update 3/15/10

In This Issue:

1. Pawlenty the Plastic Surgeon;
2. DFL Soft on Sex Offenders;
3. DFL Wants to Tax Underwear;
4. Film Board Follies.

PAWLENTY THE PLASTIC SURGEON

If you needed proof that Democrats just can't help themselves when it comes to spending, just take a gander at the bonding (debt) bill that they sent to Governor Pawlenty's desk.

Despite the worst economy in generations, despite a gaping budget deficit, despite the fact that the DFL has yet to present a budget solution, despite the fact that the Governor has repeatedly stated he will not sign a \$1 billion bonding bill, and despite the fact that the state has only budgeted \$725 million for this bill, the DFL nonetheless sent Pawlenty an Old Country Buffet style bonding bill that weighs in at a hefty \$1 billion and is filled with the fiscal equivalent of Twinkies, Little Debbie's, Cheetoes, and fried chicken.

Folks, this is one fat bill that even Jenny Craig can't help. It's time for Doctor Pawlenty to perform fiscal gastric bypass on this morbidly obese patient.

So just what's inside our big boned, slow metabolism bonding bill?

- \$31 million for zoos;
- \$8 million for volleyball centers and hockey rinks;
- \$2 million for sculpture gardens;
- \$1 million for snowmaking machines and "tubing opportunities" at Wirth Park;
- \$2.2 million for the Potter Arts Center;
- \$.84 million for the African-American Heritage Museum;
- \$16 million for Orchestra Hall;
- \$5 million for the Asian-Pacific Cultural Center;
- \$16 million for the Ordway;
- \$10 million for the Oliver Kelly Farm

And that's just a sampling of fast-food, convenience store fiscal binge our plus-sized legislation has consumed on its journey from liberal idea to legislative bill.

Sources within the Capitol say that Pawlenty has acted over the weekend to exercise his constitutional authority to "line-item" individual project appropriations to bring the bill below the budgeted amount. These sources say approximately \$300 million was removed via the line item authority, bringing the bill down into the neighborhood of \$700 million.

Once again, Governor Pawlenty has been forced to act as the only responsible adult at the Capitol and force the Democrats to live within their means and not spend us into oblivion.

Maybe the DFL can now turn their attention to providing a balanced budget proposal to solve the \$1 billion deficit. Hell, they've only been in session earning pay and "per diem" since February 4th.

DFL SOFT ON SEX OFFENDERS

Speaking of the bonding bill and DFL priorities, we ought to discuss how the DFL shortchanged a critical public safety project in favor of all the pork listed above.

The Minnesota Sex Offender Program (MSOP) at Moose Lake is a civil commitment program that receives the "worst of the worst" sexual predators after they have served their prison sentence and keeps them confined until they are no longer a danger to society.

In other words, the predators at Moose Lake would be out on the street if they weren't confined to the program.

And while it would certainly be good public policy to throw these people in prison forever, that's not the case right now and civil commitment is one more way to accomplish a very worthwhile goal: keeping these rapists and child molesters off the street and away from the rest of us.

The MSOP facility is going to run out of bed space within the next two years. Apparently, the DFL doesn't care and has significantly under-funded the expansion project in favor of petting zoos and sculpture gardens.

Governor Pawlenty had requested \$89 million for the project while the DFL only allocated \$47.5 million.

The DFL is hiding behind this number by claiming that \$47.5 million was the estimated cost of the expansion in 2006.

Of course, this is a crock of crap. In a Watchdog exclusive, we show that the actual pre-design and design work, completed in February 2007, shows that the estimated cost was \$87.9 million, which isn't too far off of the current estimated cost.

Moreover, we have conclusive proof that Rep. Loren Solberg, the chief critic of the Moose Lake project, APPROVED OF THE PROJECT ESTIMATE! He signed a letter in March 2007 agreeing with the \$87.9 estimated cost.

What is happening here is that the DFL doesn't approve of confining these dangerous perverts and is simply looking for some political cover to say they're "doing something"

while underfunding the project because of some manufactured and bogus "concerns" about the true cost.

[Click here to read the documents.](#)

DFL WANTS TO TAX UNDERWEAR

We all know that when it comes to choosing between the family budget and the governmental budget, Democrats are all about the government, contrary to their claims about being for the "working man."

Proof positive was demonstrated this past week when a DFL Senator proposed taxing the clothes right of our backs.

Tax increases are a bad idea. Tax increases during a recession is a dumb idea. Taxing our underwear during a severe recession is just plain dumb and shows how far the DFL will go to protect government spending at your expense.

Introduced by Senator Tom Bakk (DFL-Cook), the bill would tax clothing at the regular sales tax rate, bringing money into state coffers and raising taxes. Bakk uses a cute trick in his bill by buying down some state taxes in later years, to claim that his bill doesn't raise taxes.

So, let's get this straight. We'll raise taxes today and then bring them down sometime later on. Right. There's nothing to stop the legislature from delaying or eliminating that buy down provision later on.

What a bad idea. First, taxing a necessity like clothing is a "regressive" tax, meaning its impact falls disproportionately on lower-income taxpayers. The party of the "working man" doesn't seem to have any compunction about levying taxes that pound lower income folks, including higher tobacco and alcohol taxes and increased sales taxes for things like zoos and bike trails.

Second, retail clothing is one economic sector where Minnesota enjoys a competitive advantage over other states. Most states tax clothing, making Minnesota-purchased clothing less expensive, which is one reason why the Mall of America does so well. Taking away one of the few economic advantages Minnesota enjoys is all-too-typical of the DFL.

Finally, it just strikes us as punitive and repugnant to tax a person's clothing. It is a basic necessity that touches the core of our everyday life.

Perhaps Bakk could stand outside in his skivvies in front of the Capitol to demonstrate that we don't really need clothes all that badly!

FILM BOARD FOLLIES

In a final example of just how out of touch the liberals are and just how bloated the state budget really is, we bring you a tale of budgetary woe starring Minnesota's TV and Film Board, which Governor Pawlenty has marked for termination as a part of his plan to solve the state's budget deficit.

We you didn't know we had a Film Board, did you? Would you count it as a critical governmental function? That's what we thought.

If you visit the Board's web site, you can see the whining taking place over the Governor's radical idea that the Board seek private funding sources instead of relying on your tax dollars.

Far from being a positive force, entities like this one are the primary reason we have a budget problem. Government is doing too much and not doing much well.

If these people want their "snowbates" they can go compete for funding in the private sector. It's not government's job to subsidize Hollywood.

E-mail Update 3/22/10

In This Issue:

1. Debbie Johnson Changes Course;
2. Anoka County Whines Again;
3. Propping up the Train;
4. Drunken Cop in Coon Rapids.

DEBBIE JOHNSON CHANGES COURSE

State Senator Debbie Johnson (R-Ham Lake) recently lost the Republican endorsement to Michelle Benson for the District 49 seat in the state legislature.

There was speculation, fueled by Johnson herself, that she would challenge Benson in a divisive Republican primary this August.

In a change of course, Johnson told the Anoka County Union this week that she will not pursue re-election to the state Senate this year at all and will instead challenge Dick Lang for his seat on the Anoka County Board.

This news is welcome for a number of reasons. First, a primary race between Johnson and Benson would have been expensive and divisive, possibly allowing DFL candidate Paul Meunier to sneak into office representing a district that has become reliably Republican and will continue to be so this fall as President Obama and Democrats in Washington continue to drive the country into the ground with reckless deficit spending, liberal policies, and total disregard for the voters who put them into office believing that these folks would actually govern as bi-partisan moderates.

With the field cleared for Benson, Meunier has virtually no chance to win. He has been successful in winning office in Ham Lake because he hasn't been forced to reveal his partisan leanings and his views regarding larger fiscal and social issues. Once voters see the differences between Meunier and Benson on important social and fiscal issues, Benson will cruise to victory.

Benson will win in November 58-42. You heard it here first.

Second, Debbie Johnson would be a welcome addition to the Anoka County Board, especially if the Iron Lady of the Board Rhonda Sivarajah is elected Lieutenant Governor on the GOP ticket with Marty Seifert. You can't replace Rhonda, but Johnson has established a strong voting record of fiscal restraint during her tenure in the Senate.

Now if Johnson wins and Rhonda is unsuccessful in her state-wide bid, Anoka County taxpayers would enjoy three ladies who know the value of smaller government representing them on the county board. One more seat and fiscal conservatives would finally have a 4-3 majority on the board and end Dan Erhart's decades-long reign of

fiscal terror and relegate him, and his county credit card, to the dustbin of Big Government history.

If that happens, goodbye Steve Novak, goodbye Elwyn Tinklenberg, goodbye Good Ol' Boy network.

Watchdogs could actually live to see both the end of communism and the Good Ol' Boy network.

That work begins today, not in November!

ANOKA COUNTY WHINES AGAIN

Yes, this is predictable but it nonetheless is so annoying to get those taxpayer-financed county propaganda newsletters that tell us how the county is suffering because it doesn't have enough money to spend.

Anoka County taxpayers this past week received another of these newsletters, which also tell us what a great job the Good Ol' Boys are doing managing through these tough times for government.

Good Ol' Boy Commissioner Dennis Berg announced that, "The 2010 budget is already lean. We are at the point where we will have to cut services, shorten business hours, and no longer fund some programs managed by the state."

Good. Anoka County government has for many years gone way beyond the mission of a county.

And, being a public policy organization dedicated to good government, the Watchdog has some suggestions where the Anoka County Board can go to gain efficiencies and cut spending before cutting core services like law enforcement, road construction, and child protection services.

- Pay raises. The County Board dished out pay raises this year despite the fact that government is flat broke and many taxpayers have taken pay cuts and layoffs themselves. It was totally irresponsible to hand out pay raises in this fiscal environment.
- Clip the credit cards. Too many county employees have county credit cards and use them far too liberally. The Watchdog has documented Dan Erhart's penchant to fill his face at 5-star restaurants at taxpayer expense.
- Ban out-of-state-travel. Again, the Watchdog has documented the travels of Dan Erhart and other county employees who love to jaunt to Hawaii, Arizona, and Washington, DC at taxpayer expense.

- Quit doing things county governments have no business doing. They can start with Bunker Beach. The county has no business running a water park. It's not a core function of government. If there is a market for a water park, the private sector will fill it.
- Speaking of non-core functions, the county could also get out of the business of running golf courses, campgrounds, and commuter trains.
- In fact, the Parks and Recreation Department could be disbanded altogether. Providing dog parks, geochaching, and "skijoring" opportunities are precisely why government is broke.
- Fire the lobbyists. If there is business to be done at the Capitol, the commissioners can get off their duffs and drive to Saint Paul themselves.
- Disband the Travel Management Office. This department does little more than promote and prop up mass transit options that commuters already know about. Moreover, the Met Council does the same thing.
- Stop the ego-stroking pursuit of mega-projects. Chasing the Vikings stadium is a classic example of the waste of taxpayer dollars inherent in these senseless pursuits. Almost \$1 million was wasted on this effort. A football stadium? How about fixing the potholes first? Some of these county board members need to recognize that being a county commissioner isn't a glamorous job designed to grab headlines. It's an administrative job that focuses on mundane yet important tasks like running the county jail, fixing roads, and implementing state programs at the local level.

Once all that happens, we'll be more sympathetic to Dennis Berg's braying about county government's money woes.

PROPPING UP THE TRAIN

Speaking of county government spending and stroking egos, can the county stop with the incessant marketing of Northstar commuter rail?

We've all been subjected to years and years of marketing propoganda designed to brainwash us into believing the train is a good deal that can solve our travel woes, bring world piece, and increase bust size.

The Watchdog concedes that the Good Ol' Boys won that one. We concede that the train is here to stay, operating subsidies and all. But do we really need to continue to beat the damn drum on this issue? Really? Haven't we had enough? How much more propoganda do we need? How much more empire-building and ego stroking of elected officials do we need? Uncle! Mercy! We surrender!

Check out the taxpayer-financed news and information related to one commuter train that has barely covered its ridership projections and requires massive subsidies:

<http://www.metrotransit.org/Northstar/index.asp>
<http://www.northstartrain.org/>
http://www.co.anoka.mn.us/v1_departments/div-governmental-services/dept-public-information/newsletter/index.asp
<http://www.dot.state.mn.us/passengerrail/commuter.html>
<http://www.mn-getonboard.com/>

Enough!

DRUNKEN COP IN COON RAPIDS

The Watchdog doesn't weigh in on issues like this very often, but this one is really outrageous.

According to the Coon Rapids Herald, a Coon Rapids police officer who was charged with drunk driving is back at his job with the department.

Before getting into the details, we acknowledge that the officer has only been charged at this point but not convicted. Thus, the charge is only an allegation at this point.

According to the print edition of the Coon Rapids Herald (article apparently unavailable online), Coon Rapids police officer Bryan Platz was arrested January 15th for DUI after a car he was driving rear-ended another vehicle.

According to the Minnesota State Patrol, which responded to the accident, there were indications Platz had been drinking. A blood test showed Platz had a blood alcohol concentration over the legal limit of .08.

Platz has been charged with misdemeanor DUI and will appear in court in the near future.

What's troubling about the whole episode is that Platz is back at work in the Coon Rapids PD. While the article doesn't say what will happen if Platz is convicted, he shouldn't be back at work at all. He should be on administrative leave until the case is resolved. If convicted, he should be terminated.

If nothing else, being a police officer requires excellent judgment. Cops are empowered to deprive citizens of their liberty, including the use of deadly force. Driving drunk demonstrates incredibly poor judgment and a lack of moral fitness for the job.

What does it say when a cop charged with drunk driving is back on the job? How can the city expect citizens to refrain from drunk driving when their own law enforcement officers don't do so?

Drunk driving is a serious offense that kills and maims innocent people on a daily basis.

The Watchdog expects better judgment from those charged with running the city.

E-mail Update 3/29/10

In This Issue:

1. DFL wants to limit your right to vote;
2. 1/3rd of a loaf is okay - for now;
3. ObamaCare bill comes due already;
4. Federal debt bomb ticks towards detonation.

DFL WANTS TO LIMIT YOUR RIGHT TO VOTE

It's funny how the "party of the working man" never stops working to raise taxes on working people of all income levels while seeking ways to make it easier for government to raise taxes by limiting accountability and taxpayer rights.

The Great Recession has exposed the DFL as a party that really is about government budgets and not family budgets. The real constituency for the DFL isn't really working families but instead is government and public employee unions that make a living increasing spending to deliver pay and benefits that far outpace what comparable private-sector jobs pay.

Even in this economy, it really is all about government for the DFL. A prime example is House File 3063 (Senate companion 2769). This legislative turd would allow school districts to pass certain property tax levy increases without voter approval. In short, this bill, if it became law, would take away the current right of school district taxpayers to vote on certain school levies.

The bill is a classic sop to teacher unions and the entire government school industrial complex. With many levies set to expire this year, districts know it will be difficult to re-pass those levies with so many taxpayers out of work and under financial duress. Moreover, districts know it will be difficult to keep up the pressure on property taxes while home values have plummeted along with 401k balances and other middle-class investment vehicles.

The DFL solution to this dilemma? Simply take away the right of voters to re-authorize the property tax levy and instead vest the decision in the school board, many of which will adopt the increase after a perfunctory hearing late at night after the media and taxpayers have all gone home.

Supportive legislators have attempted to explain away this affront to voters by arguing that cities and counties don't need voter approval to raise their property taxes and school districts shouldn't be treated differently.

The Watchdog agrees. Cities and counties should be treated just like school districts, making cities and counties go out for voter approval before they raise property taxes.

In the alternative, if the DFL is hell-bent on taking away taxpayer rights, then taxpayer reforms should go hand-in-hand with this elimination of accountability.

How about eliminating teacher unions themselves? How about a law that prevents teachers from striking during the school year to punish students? How about paying teachers for results instead of seniority? How about universal school choice, just like in Europe?

It's about time the DFL got interested in helping students, not the education cartel. It's high time the DFL started caring about family budgets instead of the government budget.

School districts should also acknowledge that they have a spending problem, not a revenue problem.

Instead of living within a budget, school boards simply bow to the demands of teacher unions and agree to teacher contracts that they can't afford and are out of line with the economic reality of the times.

Recent teacher contracts are giving out pay and benefit increases as if the recession never happened.

Take a look at contract settlements here and ask yourself if your school district deserves to take away your right to vote on property tax increases.

1/3RD OF THE LOAF IS OKAY - FOR NOW

Last night, the DFL-led legislature and the Governor concluded negotiations on a bill that would cut spending to eliminate approximately \$310 million of the state's \$994 million budget deficit.

While the bill only addressed 1/3rd of the deficit, it was a step in right direction by cutting spending without raising taxes.

The Governor was successful in eliminating a number of poison pills that DFL tried to slip in, notably a \$25 million increase in mutual fund registration "fees" that would have amounted to nothing more than a tax on middle-class pensions.

While the Watchdog has no quarrel with this bill (which Pawlenty will no doubt sign into law), it is typical of the way the DFL does business in Saint Paul and exposes their hypocrisy.

After the November 2009 economic forecast showed a \$1.2 billion deficit, the DFL demanded that the Governor immediately release a complete and comprehensive budget solution by the end of December.

By mid-February, the governor indeed released a comprehensive proposed solution that the DFL predictably blasted the budget as punitive and mean spirited.

In response, the governor rightly asked the DFL to put forth their budget.

Now, at the end of March, after the legislature has been in session for nearly two months collecting pay and per diem, they have offered only 1/3rd of a solution.

What do you suppose, fair reader, would happen if you only did 1/3rd of your job?

Moreover, the DFL really only picked the low hanging fruit to reduce as they have yet to offer their solution to deal with cuts to human services and education, the largest and most politically sensitive areas of the state budget.

Many Capitol observers believe the DFL won't get serious about cutting these areas until May, after the DFL state convention. The DFL legislators running for governor apparently don't want to cut one penny from these sacred cows until their delegates have conferred an endorsement.

In addition, it is certainly likely that the DFL will pull another stunt like they did last year by passing tax increases just before session ends and then leaving town.

They profess they won't try to raise taxes this year because they know the political environment. Really? We bet they do. Old habits are so hard to break.

OBAMACARE BILL COMES DUE - ALREADY

Despite their best efforts to front-load the benefits and back-load the taxes and government mandates, ObamaCare is already hurting job creators and their employees in a big way.

The Wall Street Journal reported this week that some of America's biggest job providers took large financial hits because of the passage of ObamaCare.

AT&T, for example, wrote down \$1 billion in one-time charges while other like Minnesota's own 3M, took a \$90 million write down.

The charges happened because ObamaCare no longer allows companies a tax deduction for the cost of providing prescription drug coverage to retirees who are on their retirement health care plans.

Now, the non-critical thinkers out there will likely claim that this is just deserts for Wall Street and corporate America.

We beg to differ.

This large destruction of capital means that this money is no longer available to hire employees, offer better benefits, or provide a better dividend to shareholders that include pension funds and local units of government.

Ironically, this Obama tax increase will also work a hardship on retirees, including retirees who were unionized as corporate employees.

You see, AT&T took such a large write down because they not only have a large number of retirees but they also have a large number of unionized retirees who won generous company-paid post-retirement healthcare benefits in collective bargaining.

Now that Obama has worked a massive tax increase on these benefits, many companies will now have an incentive to dump the retirees into Medicare, which offers less generous benefits. Then again, the Democrats have never been opposed to making more people dependent upon government programs.

Companies will now have every incentive to dump this kind of coverage from the next labor contract.

So much for the party of the working man.

FEDERAL DEBT BOMB TICKS TOWARDS DETONATION

Here's some more sobering news regarding President Obama's management of our country and its finances.

The Congressional Budget Office this week announced that Obama's fiscal year 2011 budget will generate nearly \$10 TRILLION in cumulative deficits over the next 10 years.

To put his number in perspective, the current deficit equals \$72,000 for every household in America. Under Obama's budgets, it is estimated that deficit will rise to \$170,000 for every household by 2020.

You can make out a check for \$72,000 either to "Uncle Sam" or simply "Barak." Don't forget to include postage.

E-mail Update 4/5/10

In This Issue:

1. DFL Embraces Private Sector Job Creation
2. Solving the Deficit - How it Could Happen
3. Even Obama is ahead of Education Minnesota

EDITOR'S NOTE: Feeling happy? Wallet feeling just a little more secure? That's probably because the legislature has been on spring break since last Monday afternoon, coming back into session tomorrow. With the legislature gone, this week's edition will be a bit shorter than normal, and that's only because of the legislative break, not because Harold Hamilton took the staff to Daytona Beach for a little R&R. We swear we saw the ghost of Ted Kennedy funneling a Sam Adams pale ale, but what happens in Daytona stays in Daytona!

DFL EMBRACES PRIVATE SECTOR JOB CREATION

Just before the legislature left town, Governor Pawlenty signed a bill most observers thought would never pass a DFL-led legislature.

The bill, which passed with overwhelming bi-partisan margins, will offer tax credits to those who invest in high-tech companies in the early stages as well as a research and development tax credit to other companies regardless of whether they are newly formed or well established.

Another feature of the bill that received almost no media coverage was a provision that exempts many charter schools from paying property taxes, taking yet another step towards creating a more level playing field for those schools competing against traditional government-run schools and the monopolistic advantages they enjoy.

Now before we unduly celebrate these tax credits, the Dog points out that these tax credits are not ideal tax policy. They are targeted towards particular market sectors and thus distort decisions about where and how to deploy private capital. Ideally, the government would lower tax rates across the board and let the market decide how capital is deployed.

However, this bill is a remarkable win for Pawlenty and the viewpoint that the private sector, not government, creates the wealth that underpins our prosperity and all government programs.

The victory was all the more noteworthy because the bulk of the credits are paid for by eliminating a \$30 million "low income fuel credit" that was a part of the transportation tax bill that was passed into law over Pawlenty's veto.

The credit was a classic example of feel good liberalism run amok. First, the credit was only good for \$12.50 per person, equivalent to about 5 gallons of gas. Moreover, you didn't even need to own a car to claim the credit! In short, it was nothing more than

government playing Santa Claus in exchange for votes.

In addition, the Governor also demanded that the bill be a net tax cut in order to earn his signature. The DFL met his demand, although our sources tell us that Senate Tax chairman Tom Bakk (DFL-Cook) was irritated with House Speaker Margaret Kelliher for caving into the demand.

So why was the DFL so eager to pass a bill that gives high net worth individuals a tax break so they can invest in the private sector? Why pass a bill that ticked off their liberal base by eliminating the fuel credit giveaway?

The answer lies mostly in gubernatorial politics and a simple clash of competing DFL constituencies.

In this sour economy, labor unions and their members have experienced the pain in a significant way. Skilled construction trades, for example, have seen unemployment rates double or even triple the Minnesota average. They quickly got religion with respect to the workings of our economy and started collaborating with business groups at the Capitol on legislation to reward investment and spur the private economy, not the government economy.

As a candidate for Governor, Speaker Kelliher took a calculated risk that pleasing labor unions was worth the wrath she would face from the welfare rights crowd for taking their fuel credit. As the Watchdog has observed, Kelliher is attempting to portray herself as a politician who can get results, even bi-partisan results. She is clearly attempting to erase her past management failures of the House that saw angry Republicans decry her heavy-handed floor management style as well as failed attempts to pass large tax increases that have alienated independents who will be crucial to electing the next governor.

For his part, the Governor has played this situation well. He has avoided the call of some GOP legislators to fight the DFL simply for the sake of denying them any type of victory.

This approach is shortsighted and fails to see the long-term gain. If DFL legislative leadership wants to pass a bill that cuts taxes and offers a tax credit to spur private sector investment, the GOP should take it even if it gives legislators like Speaker Kelliher a short-term talking point for her convention later this month.

The same holds true for the budget bill Pawlenty signed last week that cuts over \$300 million from the current deficit. This bill contained hundreds of millions in actual state government budget cuts. Anytime Republicans can get the DFL to cut government, it should be embraced. Who cares if it isn't the entire solution to the budget deficit? Who cares that the cuts don't offer a massive reorganization of government? While those goals are certainly worthwhile, Pawlenty is smart to take spending cuts and tax cuts

whenever he can get them.

SOLVING THE DEFICIT - HOW IT COULD HAPPEN

Speaking of the deficit and cutting spending, here's an update on where we are with respect to the current deficit and how the gap could get closed.

After the February forecast, the state's budget gap dropped from \$1.2 billion to \$994 million.

The recent "phase 1" budget bill cut \$312 million from the deficit, leaving \$682 to be solved.

The General Assistance Medical Care (GAMC) reform bill will save the state about \$140 million this budget cycle, taking the deficit down to \$542 million.

This month, Congress is expected to pass an extension of extra federal money that reduces the state's share of Medicaid payments. This extension and expansion of the federal cost share is estimated to save the state \$408 million, which would drop the deficit to \$134 million.

While Watchdog always decries profligate Washington spending, it is money that will go elsewhere if we don't take it. Until we can get members of Congress that understand true fiscal restraint, this is the reality of the situation.

The remaining money can easily be found in health and human services spending reductions, thereby solving the deficit and closing out the session with millions in spending reductions and no tax increases. With strong DFL majorities in both the House and Senate, this is no small accomplishment.

While this scenario is certainly plausible, it does not address one major variable - the lawsuit against Pawlenty's summer 2009 unallotments. If the DFL wins this lawsuit, \$2.7 billion in unallotments would be undone. Depending upon how and when the Minnesota Supreme Court finally rules, we could be looking at a special session to resolve another \$2.7 billion.

To add a twist to all of this, don't forget that we are in the middle of the state's two-year budget cycle. Our constitution only demands that the budget be balanced at the end of the cycle, which occurs on June 30, 2011.

All the players may just decide to leave this issue open until after the November elections. This is a dangerous stratagem considering that the state spends about \$42 million out of the general fund every day.

Decisions, decisions.

EVEN OBAMA IS AHEAD OF EDUCATION MINNESOTA

Last week, Minnesota learned why it was not chosen to participate in the Obama Administration's "Race to the Top" education initiative. While we think that's a good thing because the feds have no business in telling us how to run our schools, the failed application showed that Education Minnesota, the big teacher union, is now running afoul of education reforms embraced even by liberal Democrats.

Specifically, Minnesota's application failed because the state is weak with respect to teacher quality programs. Our state lacks the policies to identify bad teachers, get rid of bad teachers, find and support good teachers, and measure overall teacher quality. Guess who's to blame for that? Education Minnesota is without question the most powerful special interest operating at the Capitol. They have successfully fought nearly every teacher improvement initiative brought forward by the Governor and legislators.

In short, the union has done a good job in accomplishing its mission to protect the status quo.

The good news is that education reform is on the march and it is only a matter of time until true reform takes root across our government school structure. When we see liberals like Al Sharpton embrace school choice, we know reform is taking hold. When we see a Democrat president cross the teacher unions to advocate for teacher quality measurements, we know the time is near for meaningful reform.

Education Minnesota is becoming an irrelevant political dinosaur that must finally embrace reform or be relegated to the ashbin of political history.

E-mail Update 4/12/10

In This Issue:

1. Windmill Woes in River City.
2. Why Does Tom Snell Hate Capitalism?
3. The Race for the GOP Endorsement.
4. Peggy Scott on the Rise.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Harold Hamilton and the Anoka County Watchdog are now up and running on Facebook and Twitter! In addition to our weekly email commentary and daily news briefs, Harold and the Anoka County Watchdog will be posting on these media as well to keep you, the taxpayer, fully informed and ready to initiate real change!

WINDMILL WOES IN RIVER CITY

According to the Anoka County Union, Anoka's quest to help bring Minnesota back to the 19th Century through the magic of windmills and the occasional power they produce has, not surprisingly, run into some problems.

In addition to being a major eyesore, the windmill often isn't up and running and when it is, the blades cause noise pollution for the homeowners who live next to our own little slice of Holland.

The Watchdog has already reported on the abject foolishness of cities like Anoka getting involved in wind generation schemes and the "green energy" mania that has gripped some folks. For Anoka, just like the county fathers, it's attractive because it's yet another chance to get government involved in another aspect of our lives.

While the article was filled with the typical pap and excuse making that comes from government, it was noted that the mighty windmill will only spin when the windspeed tops 12 mph. A quick glance at average windspeeds in the Twin Cities shows that windspeeds only top 12 mph, on average, during one single month each year (April). Admittedly, the wind speed on any particular day can top 12 mph and still yield a monthly average below that speed, but the monthly average tells us that there won't be many days of powering our homes with wind.

Here's an idea. Let's make the homes of those city council members who voted for this white elephant powered solely by the windmill and nothing else. Since they're such big supporters, surely they won't mind putting our tax money where their mouths are and taking us up on this offer.

Better yet, maybe its time for Anoka city government to focus on real issues like property taxes, crime, and economic development instead of tilting at windmills.

It looks like the city council has contracted a case of AMD (Attracted to Megaprojects Disorder).

WHY DOES TOM SNELL HATE CAPITALISM?

Our good friend Tom Snell, MetroNorth Chamber of Commerce director, is at it again. As Chamber director, Tom is often in the curious position of arguing against capitalism and free market economics.

You would think a lifetime of anti-capitalism would make the conversion of Tom into a Friedman loving, Austrian School, Chicago School lover of the Invisible Hand a lost cause.

No way. As a free market missionary, Harold Hamilton is the Grand Caliph of Capitalism and relentless in his pursuit of saving economic souls, even Tom's.

This week was a set back as Tom was possessed by the ObamaCare demon, which caused Tom to speak in tongues about the acceptability of the federal government abusing the Commerce Clause to force citizens to participate in commerce by purchasing health care or facing a penalty.

Tom, there's no way the Framers ever viewed the Commerce Clause as a weapon to force citizens to participate in commerce against their will. If it's acceptable to do so for health insurance, why not life insurance, auto insurance, or homeowner's insurance? Heck, why not force Americans to purchase a Government Motors Cadillac?

C'mon, Tom. Your retirement draws near but there is still time!

THE RACE FOR THE GOP ENDORSEMENT

Editor's Note: Harold Hamilton is supporting Marty Seifert for governor.

We are just about two weeks away from the Republican state convention that will confer the endorsement for governor on Tom Emmer, Marty Seifert, or Leslie Davis. Okay, we're kidding about Les.

As a well-connected political insider, the Watchdog is frequently asked about the race for the endorsement and the delegate headcount.

According to our highly placed sources, Seifert has a slight lead over Emmer. While Emmer has built a bit of momentum, our sources say the Easter legislative break helped Seifert more than Emmer but the race is ever-so-close and promises to be an exciting affair in Minneapolis at the end of April.

In news this week, a brawl erupted between the two camps when Seifert signed the Taxpayer's League of Minnesota pledge not to raise taxes while Emmer declined. The

pledge took on major significance in 2002, the last time we had an open seat for governor, when both Tim Pawlenty and Brian Sullivan signed the pledge as gubernatorial candidates.

Having only one candidate sign the pledge has caused quite a buzz amongst delegates, with many telling the Watchdog that they don't trust politicians and their "word" and that pledges therefore mean much to them and their decision regarding the endorsement.

Stay tuned!

PEGGY SCOTT ON THE RISE

The sold out Palin-Bachmann rally was an incredible display of conservative enthusiasm and a preview of coming attractions this November as foot soldiers from the Army of Limited Government gathered for fellowship and good old fashioned political rally with two ladies who know a thing or two about firing up the faithful.

At the rally, we noticed that sitting front and center immediately behind the podium was another lady who knows a thing or two about free markets and limited government. Yes, that was state Representative Peggy Scott (R-Andover) who could be seen every time the camera focused on the speaker at the podium. Heck, has the DFL even found anyone to run against her? Maybe DFL big wig Mel Aanerud could run. He seems to have an awful lot of time on his hands writing inane and vapid letters to the editor every week. He could bring that same bored style and tired talking point regurgitation to every home in District 49A while Peggy rolls up about 65% of the vote in November.

And just off to the viewer's left? Yes, that was state Senate candidate Michelle Benson sharing the stage with other rising political stars. Her opponent, Paul Meunier, should be no sweat this fall.

You go girls!!!

E-mail Update 4/19/10

In This Issue:

1. Capitol Update.
2. Dan Erhart and Northstar rail - it never stops.
3. Keeping them Accountable.
4. The 2010 Pig Book Has Flown.

CAPITOL UPDATE

NO BUDGET, NO PLAN, NO LEADERSHIP

With just over a month left before the legislature adjourns on May 17th, The DFL majority continues to do very little, which is both a good thing and a bad thing. Well, it's a good thing.

It's amazing and appalling that the DFL has yet to unveil a comprehensive budget that solves the current \$1 billion budget deficit. Then again, it's really not surprising when you consider that asking the DFL to reduce spending is a bit like asking Tiger Woods to stay faithful. (Editor's note: We still love Tim Pawlenty's line that it's time to take 9-iron to the back window of big government!)

By the same token, it's amazing to consider that the media has given the liberal legislative majority in Saint Paul a free pass on this issue. We have known since early December of 2009 that the state faced a \$1 billion shortfall. Within 2 months of that news, Governor Pawlenty published a supplemental budget solution that solved the budget deficit by cutting spending and not raising taxes.

Since the session began in early February, the DFL has sat around and collected pay, mileage, per diem, and lodging while doing virtually nothing to solve this fiscal crisis. Yes, Governor Pawlenty did manage to bring them to the negotiating table to agree on \$312 million worth of the solution, but we're still hundreds of millions short.

Watchdogs with DFL legislative representation should call their legislators to demand that they get off their duffs and do their work.

The hypocrisy is overwhelming. Senate DFL Majority Leader Larry Pogemiller demanded that the Governor produce a budget plan immediately last December so the legislature could get to work. Pawlenty's plan has now been on the table for nearly 3 months.

These DFL leaders have been in office for decades and know how the legislative process works. Like college students with a paper due tomorrow, they are procrastinating and hoping that somehow tax money will fall out of the sky and save them from cutting government.

Again like a college student, look for the DFL to pull an all-nighter in mid-May full of tax increases and other big government solutions that will meet with Professor Pawlenty's red pen.

SPRING-SPRING BREAK

In keeping with the college co-ed theme, the DFL's lack of a budget solution isn't the only shirking of obligations they've been thinking about lately.

Last week, the aforementioned DFL Senator Pogemiller mentioned in a press conference that he thought it would be acceptable if the legislature took a two-week break from mid to late April since "there wasn't much left to do."

Our Capitol sources corroborated this plan, saying that DFL legislative leadership had reached out to GOP leadership to gauge their interest in going along with the plan. The GOP smartly said no.

It's especially outrageous to think that the DFL was talking about a spring break when they JUST TOOK ONE! The legislature was on break from March 30 to April 6, just about two weeks ago.

How much time off do these people want? If any of us in the private sector thought about this much time off, especially when our work wasn't done, we'd be fired.

That's a novel idea. If the DFL wants some time off, the voters should give it to them in November - permanently.

DAN ERHART AND NORTHSTAR RAIL - IT NEVER STOPS

The Good Ol' Boy Godfather must be bored these days. Like a Hollywood actor whose best days have long past, Erhart clings to Northstar rail as a reminder of days when his influence and power mattered.

Even though the line has been up and running for months and even though there is no longer a need for politicians like him to shake down taxpayers for train money, Erhart is still out there trying to stay relevant to the heavily subsidized train riding public.

Case in point is a photo (unavailable online) published in last Friday's Coon Rapids Herald showing Erhart taking full credit for the Northstar train's Target Field service for Twins games.

Like the 7th grade math teacher we all laughed at in middle school, Erhart is wearing the same clothes he wears in every photo, the tired old sport coat (complete with Northstar pin) and dark slacks doing little to conceal the paunch brought on by too many taxpayer-financed power lunches and too little door knocking to actually meet the voters who pay his salary.

Next to Erhart is some overweight hunyuck with a goatee and Twins windbreaker standing next to the Godfather with a Northstar ticket kiosk in the background.

Erhart obviously collared this unwitting taxpayer at the Northstar station and convinced him to become a prop in yet another campaign photo op disguised as news.

Thank goodness government budgets are in such great shape that we can spend \$312 million to give people a heavily subsidized ride to the baseball game so they don't actually have to do the hard work of steering the car down the already existing freeway to park in an already existing parking ramp.

Give them bread and circus indeed!

KEEPING THEM ACCOUNTABLE

There's a great new web site out there that helps Minnesota taxpayers keep our legislators accountable. Billsandvotes.com tracks important votes taken by the legislature and lets visitors see how individual legislators vote with respect to important issue areas like property rights, crime, and taxes.

It's especially helpful in tracking legislators who don't always vote in a manner consistent with their professed ideology, like a certain state representative from Brooklyn Park with the initials M.H. or a certain state rep. from Anoka who sometimes strays from the party platform.

Hopefully this web site will make a good, strong run. A web site offering a comprehensive data base and analysis of legislative voting records is extremely labor intensive and previous efforts in this regard have been short lived. Good luck to this effort!

EDITOR'S NOTE: The Anoka County Watchdog and the Minnesota Watchdog are not affiliated with this web site.

THE 2010 PIG BOOK HAS FLOWN

All great democracies feature documents that capture the spirit of the moment and define the stark choices we often face in protecting our freedoms.

The annual "Pig Book" from Citizens Against Government Waste is just such a document. As Congressional pork barrel earmarks have decimated our economic freedom, plunged the nation into debt and eroded our sovereignty, this comprehensive database uses the power of the First Amendment to expose what our elected officials in Washington are doing with respect to this murky, slimy process.

Sadly, despite the growing national debt, rising voter anger, and a promise to "change" Washington, the earmark process rolls along enabled by politicians who are addicted to spending as surely as David Hasselhoff is addicted to booze.

In 2010, there were some 9,129 earmarks worth \$16.5 billion. Most troubling, over \$6 billion of those earmarks blatantly violated Congress' own rules against anonymous earmarks, depriving the public of its right to know which members of Congress asked for earmarks.

So what of Minnesota's delegation? The Pig's Book searchable database on House members (Senate will come later) shows the following:

District 1: Tim Walz (DFL)
13 earmarks worth \$9.7 million
Lowlight: \$200,000 for soybean genomics

District 2: John Kline (GOP)
NONE

District 3: Erik Paulsen (GOP)
9 earmarks worth \$7.5 million
Lowlight: The fact that Paulsen would seek earmarks at all

District 4: Betty McCollum (DFL)
14 earmarks worth \$8.7 million
Lowlight: \$200,000 for a neighborhood development center

District 5: Keith Ellison (DFL)
18 earmarks worth \$23 million
Lowlight: \$150,000 to refurbish the Coe Mansion (whatever that is)

District 6: Michele Bachmann (GOP)
NONE

District 7: Collin Peterson (DFL)
10 earmarks worth \$13.7 million
Lowlight: \$550,000 for the Center for Rural Entrepreneurial Studies. Aren't entrepreneurs folks who create wealth WITHOUT government help?

District 8: Jim Oberstar (DFL)
33 earmarks worth over \$72 million
Lowlight: Oberstar's blatant disregard for America's future as evidenced by his relentless efforts to waste billions on his pet pork projects. This guy has no shame.

E-mail Update 4/26/10

In This Issue:

1. Kelliher Advances: Does it Matter?
2. Why Emmer's DUIs Matter.
3. Capitol Update.
4. Who Owns the DFL?
5. Join the Conservative Women

KELLIHER ADVANCES: DOES IT MATTER?

House Speaker Margaret Anderson Kelliher won the DFL endorsement for governor Saturday night in Duluth. Because she had been tabbed as a front-runner by pundits for some time, her win isn't all that surprising. By the same token, she did surprise observers by scoring a decisive victory on only the 5th ballot. Going into the convention, Kelliher was neck and neck with Minneapolis Mayor RT Rybak and many gave him the advantage due to his better public speaking skills and higher charisma factor.

With the endorsement, Kelliher has only taken one step towards the governor's office as a bruising and expensive primary awaits where she isn't even the favorite. Former House Minority Leader Matt Entenza, former Senator Mark Dayton, and Ramsey County Attorney Susan Gaertner and other minor wannabes will all be on the DFL primary ballot to give Kelliher a run for her money.

Entenza and Dayton will be formidable primary opponents. Both have high name recognition among DFL voters and are savvy political veterans. More importantly, both are independently wealthy and will likely outspend Kelliher, who will have to rely on party resources and whatever she can raise from donors who will also be called upon to give to congressional candidates like Tarryl Clark in the 6th District and a beleaguered Tim Walz in the First District. Moreover, the DFL has a number of vulnerable first-term state legislators who won narrow victories in 2008 and 2006 who will be hard pressed to keep their seats.

This year will also see a move to an August instead of September primary. An ultra-low primary turnout will mitigate the advantage of the endorsed candidate regarding voter turnout. Again, Entenza and Dayton have the resources to ensure a good turnout from their supporters.

The Watchdog gives the edge to Dayton in the primary.

In the long term, a Kelliher governorship doesn't matter insofar as she would govern just like any other DFLer running for the job. High taxes, a bloated government, more regulation, firearms restrictions, gay rights, and expanded abortion would all be on the agenda whether its Dayton, Entenza, or Kelliher.

In the short term, the endorsement of Kelliher matters because she is still the House Speaker. Barring the unlikely event that she resigns the post prior to the legislative session adjourning in May, Kelliher will retain her leadership position and have little incentive to cooperate with Governor Pawlenty on education reform, taxes, the budget, and other key outstanding legislative issues.

As the endorsed candidate, she now assumes more of a "shadow governor" profile and has an opportunity to endear herself to the DFL base by confronting the Governor.

Look for very little to get done between now and May 17th. There seems to be a sense of resignation at the Capitol that the status quo will prevail until voters choose a new legislature and governor in November.

WHY EMMER'S DUIs MATTER

A debate has raged within the GOP since the Marty Seifert campaign disseminated a letter from a delegate calling attention to Tom Emmer's two DUis last week.

(For background on the matter, [click here](#).)

The Emmer campaign has decried the letter as a "smear" tactic while some GOP delegates have said that the letter will damage Emmer in November should he be the endorsee. Others have said the issue is dated and is thus irrelevant to the debate.

Others say the matter deserves debate because of the seriousness of the offense, the multiple offenses, and the belief that criminal offenses like this do matter to voters and thus affect Emmer's electability.

The simple fact is that Emmer's legal problems do matter and should be a part of the discourse among delegates. While delegates will ultimately come to different conclusions regarding the relative importance of this issue as it influences their vote, it certainly deserves discussion because two alcohol-related incidents speak to judgment, a key character trait all Minnesotans rightly demand of their governor.

To begin, it makes no sense to claim the issue shouldn't be raised because the DFL will use it in November against Emmer should he be the endorsed candidate. This issue was known to the DFL and the general public as far back as the spring of 2009 and would have no doubt been used regardless. Hiding the issue would have only delayed the discussion, not prevented it.

While some time has passed since the incidents, the serious nature of the offense demands continued scrutiny and attention. According to MADD, 11,773 Americans were killed by drunk drivers in 2008 (last year statistics were available).

Moreover, the fact that there were two incidents ten years apart adds to the issue's relevance. It would be far easier to dismiss one instance than two of them separated by

a decade. Two offenses look more like a pattern than an isolated instance. MADD states that first-time offenders have driven drunk an average of 87 times before their first arrest.

Next, it is harder to chalk it up to the "young and stupid" argument. Emmer was 30 when the second incident occurred. Again, delegates will make up their own mind regarding the cut off age for using the "young and stupid" argument but 30 years of age is certainly stretching the popular understanding of the term.

In short, Emmer's DUIs are important and deserve to be debated. The question for debate is not whether to raise the issue, but instead to assess how important it is not only to GOP delegates but to the electorate at large. It is better to have the conversation before the endorsement rather than after, as uncomfortable as the subject matter may be. Marty Seifert does not lack integrity and isn't a desperate candidate because he raised the issue. In fact, he did his job as a loyal opponent by bringing it to the fore. We can confront this issue on our own terms as a party or possibly face it down the road on the DFL's terms.

Finally, some have argued that Emmer introduced DUI-related legislation in the House in order to mask the two incidents on his record. The Watchdog won't address this charge because there is no way to divine what motives were in his heart regarding his authorship. Moreover, we accept his explanation he did so in order to enhance personal liberties and not address his personal experience with our DUI laws.

Both Seifert and Emmer are decent men who would both do well leading our state despite the flaws and mistakes each may have made in their public or private lives. Ultimately, the endorsement process is a job interview in which the delegates assess, among other things, the character and electability of each candidate. It would be a mistake to artificially confine the process to a sterile comparison of where each stands on the issues of the day. To be honest, there isn't a real difference between the two on major issues. Examining the differences, such as they are, is a hair-splitting "inside baseball" exercise that matters only to a small sliver of the base. To the broader GOP, both are pro-life, pro-business, pro-freedom, pro-second Amendment candidates who will look wonderful when compared to the general election opponent.

In short, examining something as serious as two DUI-related offenses is not only appropriate, it is incumbent upon us as Republicans. Emmer's offenses do impact his electability. The question is how much.

Editor's Note: Harold Hamilton supports Marty Seifert for governor and believes he is the best man for the job.

CAPITOL UPDATE

The legislature has a mere three weeks left in the 2010 session before adjourning sine die and heading home to campaign. Here are three big issues on the docket and what we're hearing from our Capitol sources.

Vikings stadium.

The Vikings are definitely pushing hard to get a stadium bill done and passed during this session. The rumor we hear is that a bill will be introduced this week that will include money for a new Saint Paul Saints stadium and a practice arena for the Minnesota Wild as well.

Despite the Vike's best propaganda efforts, there is no real movement on this issue. The Vikings still lack a local partner, a stadium site, a defined financing plan, and legislative champions. You can't find the fact that there aren't too many legislators who want to be out front on a taxpayer-subsidized stadium when the state is \$1 billion in debt and the voters are sick of fat cats coming to the public trough for a hand-out.

In addition, the Vikings have once again displayed a lack of sophistication and ineptitude with this latest PR plan. In an effort to make it look like something is really happening when it isn't, the Vikings have been forced to insinuate that something is happening in smoke-filled back rooms out of the eye of the public. If the Twins learned anything in their quest to fleece the taxpayer, it's that an open, lengthy, and transparent process is crucial to success. Telling the public that something is happening behind the scenes but voters don't get to see it is not a recipe for success. But that's the Vikings for you. You would think they could afford to hire some good lobbyists.

Look for this issue to go nowhere.

Human Services budget. The House is getting prepared to unveil this budget, which will constitute "phase II" of the supplemental budget to resolve the \$1 billion deficit. Remember that the legislature and governor have already signed "phase I" which sliced \$312 million off the deficit, leaving about \$560 million left to solve. With a potential extension of an enhanced federal co-pay for Medicaid amounting to \$408 million, that leaves about \$152 million left to solve, which will likely come from this budget.

The real question is whether the DFL will really cut spending in this budget or raise taxes instead, disguising them as "fees" or "surcharges."

K12 Budget and Policy.

Both the House and Senate are expected to unveil education bills. These bills are noteworthy because they are expected to give a preview the kind of reforms, if any, the DFL are willing to accept in order to induce Governor Pawlenty to reapply for the federal "Race to the Top" program.

The push for these reforms as sparked nothing short of a civil war within the DFL, with some legislators embracing the needed reforms and others sticking with Education

Minnesota, the teacher's union, in blocking the reforms and attempting to protect the status quo.

Stay tuned.

WHO OWNS THE DFL?

Education Minnesota, the teacher's union, that's who. If you needed final confirmation, this past week at the legislature proved it beyond a shadow of a doubt.

During a joint meeting of the House and Senate education committees, the president of Education Minnesota was given a seat at the table where only legislators and staff are to sit.

The president of the union, who is also a registered lobbyist, had no business sitting at a table reserved only for legislators. It is unprecedented to see such a move and it only confirmed in the eyes of the public that Education Minnesota is a powerful voice in the DFL party.

The seating of the union president was so troubling that state Representative Marty Seifert moved to amend the permanent House rules to prevent lobbyists from sitting at committee hearing tables in the future.

The DFL was shamed into agreeing nearly unanimously with the motion.

JOIN THE CONSERVATIVE WOMEN

Voices of Conservative Women is a promising new group that seeks to promote and elect conservative ladies. Check them out:

www.voicesofconservativewomen.org

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www.twitter.com/voiceswomen

info@voicesofconservativewomen.org

E-mail Update 5/3/10

In This Issue:

1. The "no one cares" Endorsement of the Year.
2. Capitol Update.
3. GOP Convention a Home Run.
4. DFL Candidates in Outer Space.
5. State Has Too Much Money.
6. Minneapolis Schools Have Too Much Money.

THE "NO ONE CARES" ENDORSEMENT OF THE YEAR

Failed congressional and gubernatorial candidate Elwyn Tinklenberg has endorsed Matt Entenza for governor.

Wow. Entenza now has the support of a Washington lobbyist and Anoka County Good Ol' Boy.

If this is the best Entenza (AKA "tax and spendza") can do regarding high-profile endorsements, he better pack it in. No one, even within the DFL, gives a rip about what Tinklenberg thinks about the governor's race or any other issues for that matter.

For our sake, we can only hope Entenza relies on Tinklenberg for campaign advice.

CAPITOL UPDATE

The legislature only has two weeks left to make mischief and raid our wallets. Per the Minnesota Constitution, the legislature must adjourn no later than May 17th. Then it's off to face the voters - and boy are they pi**ed off with the Democrats. Good luck with that one, DFLers.

Here are the hot rumors from our Capitol sources:

First, it is widely expected that the Minnesota Supreme Court will issue its ruling this week regarding Governor Pawlenty's 2009 unilateral budget cuts, known as "unallotments."

Of course, welfare special interests sued the Governor over the cuts and the House Democrats in Saint Paul jumped in by filing a "friend of the court" brief, which was financed with taxpayer dollars!

A Ramsey County District Court judge ruled in favor of the welfare groups earlier this year which caused Pawlenty to appeal directly to the Supreme Court.

At stake are some \$1.7 billion in unallotments the Governor made to balance the state's budget last year.

If the Court rules for the plaintiffs, the state will have one hell of a mess on its hands. Potentially, this could lead to a lengthy special session, with DFLers insisting that tax increases be used to solve the gap while Republicans would be just as adamant that spending be reduced to cover the gap.

In an election year, this could get really interesting.

Conversely, if the Court rules for Pawlenty, the drama is averted and the legislature will simply go home and begin campaigning for mercy from the aforementioned angry voters.

Second, the Vikings continue to push for a stadium and no one is listening. A stadium bill will be unveiled today to the sound of crickets chirping.

The Vikings have no local partner, no stadium site, and no funding plan that garners the agreement of the stakeholders.

Combined with a still-weak economy and voter concern regarding billionaire bailouts, look for a classic political finish to this issue where the legislature does nothing for the Vikings but tries to make it look like something was done.

Our sources tell us the Vikings want their bill to pass of the floor of one House of the legislature to make it look like progress. While the content of the bill is still being negotiated, it may end up being something as watered down as a new study or the vague authorization of any local unit of government to begin financial negotiations directly with the Vikings.

The real problem for the Vikings is that they still have the same inept lobbying team running the show - thankfully.

By the way, if you want to give voice to your opposition regarding a taxpayer-funded Vikings stadium, you can sign this cool petition.

Third, the DFL is doing everything in their power to get out of an agreement they reached with the Governor regarding the remarkable reform of the welfare healthcare program called General Assistance Medical Care (GAMC), one of three welfare healthcare programs funded by the taxpayers.

Apparently, there is some DFL buyer's remorse in agreeing to cut back on an entitlement program such as this one. As DFL healthcare guru Senator Linda Berglin observed, "It's never good to have to cut programs."

The DFL has a healthcare bill that would repeal the deal and buy into an expansion of the federal Medical Assistance (MA) program, an uncapped entitlement program that would cost an extra \$2 BILLION in the next budget cycle, with \$1 billion coming from

Washington (money it doesn't have) and \$1 billion from the state (\$1 billion we don't have). In fact, the state is already projected to have a \$5 billion deficit in the next budget cycle and doesn't need another \$1 billion larded on top.

Look for Pawlenty to veto this bill within seconds of it showing up on his desk.

Finally, there is some hope that legislative and electoral gridlock is so evident that the DFL will pack up shop early and head home to campaign.

With DFL House Speaker Margaret Kelliher the DFL endorsed candidate for governor and the fatigue the DFL has experienced in losing to Pawlenty for nearly eight years, there is a good amount of chatter in the Capitol hallways that the DFL really sees no upside to sticking around when they could be out campaigning.

GOP CONVENTION A HOME RUN

Republicans gathered in Minneapolis over the weekend to endorse a slate of candidates for state-wide office.

The faithful walked in enthusiastic and left passionate and unified behind our slate of candidates.

Even the gubernatorial contest was a civil affair in which the delegates supported their candidate respectfully even though the contest was at times heated and filled with tension.

Tom Emmer won the endorsement and is now the undisputed GOP candidate for governor. Although Watchdog founder Harold Hamilton supported Marty Seifert, Emmer ran a great convention floor campaign that generated excitement that has often been missing from previous conventions.

Having said that, a number of veteran GOP insiders tell the Dog that Emmer needs to retool his campaign for the general election fight, where the battlefield is much larger and more complex. These folks say the staff who helped Emmer earn the endorsement needs to be shuffled out and more experienced and savvy operatives need to be brought in.

There is no doubt that Emmer will need to tailor his conservative message in ways that resonate with independents and conservative Democrats. The simple fact is that Emmer cannot win with Republicans alone. He will need to reach out to other sectors of the electorate to craft the plurality needed win in November.

Our message can and will resonate this fall. Smaller government, fiscal responsibility, and individual freedom are not so much Republican values as they are human values.

It's also important to remember the other fine candidate who will share the ballot with Emmer this year:

Secretary of State: Dan Severson
State Auditor: Pat Anderson
Attorney General: Chris Barden

We leave our convention unified and resolute while the DFL can look forward to a bruising and expensive primary for governor that will bleed into other races.

And with Matt Entenza in the mix, you can bet things will get nasty.

DFL CANDIDATES IN OUTER SPACE

It's too predictable that the liberal pundits and talking heads would immediately brand GOP gubernatorial candidate Tom Emmer as too radical.

So in the interest of equal time, let's not forget what the DFL has promised Minnesota should they control the governor's office.

Mark Dayton promises to tax job creators, which would provide an incentive for them to leave the state and take their job opportunities with them. Dayton apparently didn't get both memos: the one about Minnesota being a high-tax state already and the one about high taxes providing a disincentive for job creators regarding location and expansion choices.

DFL endorsed candidate Margaret Kelliher has gotten a free pass from the media on her pledge to pursue universal, single-payer, government-run health care, which is even worse than Obamacare.

Earth to Marge and Mark, earth to Marge and Mark...

STATE HAS TOO MUCH MONEY

As the DFL wails and gnashes their collective teeth over Minnesota's budget deficit and Governor Pawlenty's insistence on spending cuts, we learn of yet one more reason why the state budget is still bloated and why there's plenty of fat left to cut before we get to the bone.

KSTP television offered a brilliant expose of 250 state employees on a junket to Grand View Lodge on the shores of Gull Lake. The budget for the junket was at least \$50,000.

Predictably, many skipped out during the work day to frolic on the beach and drink booze. Many of the employees were caught on camera bragging about skipping work and noting that this type of behavior is to be expected when you bring state employees to a resort for training.

What's worse, the state has more of these junkets planned for this summer. The total estimated cost of these junkets is nearly \$375,000.

MINNEAPOLIS SCHOOLS HAVE TOO MUCH MONEY

Minnesota's worst performing school district is about to spend \$27 million on a new headquarters building.

Are you kidding? Here's a school district with abysmal results that spends more per student than any other district in the state and still complains of "underfunding" at every turn.

A \$27 million headquarters building. Yeah, you guys really deserve it.

E-mail Update 5/10/10

In This Issue:

1. Supreme Court Goes Activist;
2. The \$3 Billion Question.
3. Vikings Prove Off-field Ineptness.

SUPREME COURT GOES ACTIVIST

The Minnesota Supreme Court's narrow 4-3 decision to reverse Governor Pawlenty's \$2.7 billion worth of unilateral budget cuts is nothing short of stunning. It's stunning in the sense that it was an egregious act of judicial activism. It was a naked act of the judiciary not interpreting the law but instead rewriting the law.

Because Watchdogs are well-read and know the issues, it's important to get beyond what the Star Tribune has written and truly understand what the case was about and precisely how the Supreme Court engaged in massive, shocking judicial activism.

At issue is the unallotment statute, found in the law books at Chapter 16A.152 (Subd.4). This law allows the governor to take solo action to address budget shortfalls.

Pawlenty did this at the start of the current state budget cycle when he unallotted a \$2.7 billion budget shortfall in June of 2009 (the budget cycle starts on July 1). The shortfall occurred when the legislature sent Pawlenty spending bills that didn't balance, which he signed into law. The legislature then sent a massive tax increase bill to address the shortfall, which Pawlenty vetoed.

One group sued, claiming that the unallotment statute was effective only for "unanticipated" budget shortfalls. The group claimed that the shortfall wasn't unanticipated because Pawlenty vetoed a tax increase that would have addressed the issue AND because this was done just before the whole budget cycle started.

Ramsey County District Court Judge Gearin essentially agreed with the complainant, invalidating the June 2009 unallotments.

Gearin's decision was poorly written and based in judicial activism. Gearin herself made law by reading into the statute certain preconditions on the use of unallotment that are not found in the text of the statute.

It is vital to remember, however, that Gearin did not invalidate the law, she only limited the use of it to situations arising after the budget cycle starts. That means that there was unallotment power available immediately to the Governor because the state faced an ADDITIONAL shortfall based on the November 2009 budget forecast. In other words, there was additional deficit discovered after the budget cycle started. Today, that deficit stands at \$536 million.

And here is where the Supreme Court's decision gets so bad by being so activist.

The majority wrote:

The unallotment statute provides the executive branch with authority to address an unanticipated deficit that arises after the legislative and executive branches have enacted a balanced budget. The statute does not shift to the executive branch a broad budget-making authority allowing the executive branch to address a deficit that remains after a legislative session because the legislative and executive branches have not resolved their differences.

Carefully read that first sentence. There is absolutely nothing in the plain text of the unallotment law that states that the power is available to the governor only after the executive and legislative branches have enacted a balanced budget. Here, the four justices who wrote for the majority clearly rewrote the law to state that the enactment of a balanced budget was a prerequisite to the use of the unallotment power.

Since the legislature and governor never enacted a balanced budget at the start of this budget cycle, the Supreme Court took the unallotment power away from the governor for every last dollar of the current \$3 billion deficit.

While most people focus on the judicial activism so pervasive in the federal judiciary, it is now crystal clear that the same strain of virulent activism has infected our state judicial branch as well.

While the four justices in the majority could not have been more incorrect, the three justices in the minority were stellar in the dissenting opinion.

Justice Gildea's dissent is simply outstanding. Although somewhat lengthy, please take a moment to carefully read her words. She not only hits the nail on the head regarding this case, she also offers a universal and timely observation regarding the role of the judicial branch in interpreting and applying the law.

In our constitution, the people of Minnesota restricted the ability of the state government to deficit spend. The political branches have agreed on a process in the unallotment statute for ensuring that the government meets this obligation. Whether that process is the wisest or most prudent way to avoid deficit spending is not an issue for judicial review. That question should be left to the people themselves to debate and resolve through the political process. The judiciary's duty is simply to apply the law as written by the legislature. *Int'l Bhd. of Elec. Workers, Local No. 292 v. City of St. Cloud*, 765 N.W.2d 64, 68 (Minn. 2009) (Magnuson, C.J., for a unanimous court). The majority is unable to do so because the language the Legislature used in the unallotment statute leaves the majority with uncertainty and ambiguity. The majority therefore rewrites the statute to insert additional conditions, and then finds that the Commissioner of Minnesota Management and Budget (Commissioner) violated the statute because he did not comply with the conditions the majority has added.

Unlike the majority, I do not find the language the Legislature used uncertain or ambiguous as applied to the unallotment at issue in this case. I would not rewrite the statute; I would apply the language as written.

Because I would hold that the executive branch complied with the plain language of the statute, and that respondents have not met their burden to prove that the statute is unconstitutional, I respectfully dissent.

AMEN!

THE \$3 BILLION QUESTION

The upshot of all of this is that the state now has a \$3 billion question before it could be resolved (or not) in a number of different ways.

First, the question may not be resolved until a new governor and a new legislature are elected, although this scenario is somewhat unlikely.

But the scenario is certainly possible. Remember that Minnesota's constitutional requirement for a balanced budget applies only to the end of the budget cycle. In other words, the state can be in deficit as long as the books are squared by the last day of the budget cycle, which in this case is June 30, 2011.

Also remember that the party that sued the state over unallotment was only one group whose claim was worth only \$5 million of the \$2.7 billion. Put another way, the other parties affected by the unallotments must first come to court and get a judgment in their favor. Although these parties would all prevail against the state, the point is that not every party is going to come forward and not all at once. Already, some groups have said there is no point going to court to get money from a broke state.

So, at least in theory, the state could limp along until a new line-up is elected in the fall.

A second resolution could be to have the legislature simply pass a law ratifying all of the unallotments. That would resolve most of the deficit and moot the remaining legal claims, leaving the \$536 million of current deficit to be resolved.

This is unlikely because the DFL won't simply ratify what they "won" in court. They want some tax increases.

A third scenario relies on tax increases, at least in part. This scenario is unlikely as Governor Pawlenty is rock solid opposed to tax increases and the legislature lacks the votes to override. In order to do so, Speaker Margaret Kelliher would need to have all 87 House DFLers and then find three Republicans to join them for the 90 votes needed to override.

In this political environment, none of the 47 House Republicans could survive voting to override Pawlenty's veto. Moreover, not all 87 House Democrats would go along with it either. Many of them won narrow victories in traditionally GOP districts in the waves of 2006 and 2008. For them, votes to raise taxes in an election year would be political suicide. So, good luck with that one.

The most likely scenario is one in which the DFL gets some parting gifts that aren't tax or fee increases in exchange for ratifying the unallotments. An example would be another round of bonding bills or some welfare healthcare spiffs.

The other issue at play is timing. The session ends next Monday. If there is no agreement, the Governor will have to decide if he wants to call a special session and haul legislators back the Capitol.

If there is no agreement, Pawlenty will likely call an immediate special session to keep the pressure on the DFL to agree to a reasonable solution.

While there will be pressure on all parties to get the job done, the pressure on Speaker Kelliher will be enormous.

She has a bruising August 10th primary coming up and will not want to be bogged down at the Capitol negotiating a settlement.

Kelliher will also face pressure from many of her troops to get a deal because they don't want to be stuck at the Capitol when they could be home campaigning to keep their seats.

Moreover, she will be buffeted by both sides of the tax increase debate. On the one hand, her traditional base will demand tax increases, as will her DFL primary opponents, led by Mark Dayton.

On the other hand, Kelliher knows tax increases are wildly unpopular within the broader electorate, especially amongst independent voters. She doesn't want to be seen as the architect of a tax increase.

Finally, Kelliher will want to wrap up a deal quickly because she wants to be seen as a competent leader and manager. Getting bogged down in a messy budget fight at the very time she is attempting to sell herself to the electorate as chief executive material.

The bottom line is that the Watchdog predicts a short special session that produces an agreement that doesn't raise taxes or fees but gives the DFL a major parting gift or two.

VIKINGS PROVE OFF-FIELD INEPTNESS

Lost in the shuffle of this week's legislative developments was the smackdown defeat the Vikings took at the Capitol in their audacious quest to secure a taxpayer hand-out for a new football field.

A House committee voted down the proposal, leaving the stadium plan dead for the session, even before the unallotment decision upset the apple cart.

The Vikings effort this time around was especially laughable and proved once again that chief lobbyist Lester Bagley couldn't lobby Chastity Bono to become a man.

The comedy of errors definitely accrued to the advantage of the taxpayer.

First, going after a stadium in this fiscal environment was a bad move that garnered no popular support except amongst hardcore fans.

Second, Bagley came to the party entirely too late, kicking out a proposal with only two weeks left in session. Moreover, he should have seen that the unallotment lawsuit was hanging out there to possibly suck the political oxygen out of the room.

Third, the Vikings showed up without a local partner and an agreed-upon plan, instead offering a vague plan that drew only opponents. For a stadium to work, there must be a specific plan that allows legislators to weigh and consider the political risks.

Fourth, Bagley apparently can't count votes. You never bring a bill up for a vote unless you know you're going to win.

Ziggy, give Lester a bonus! He's doing a GREAT job!

See you next year, Zygster.

E-mail Update 5/24/10

In This Issue:

SPECIAL UPDATE - SESSION REVIEW

PART I: INSIDE THE BUDGET AGREEMENT

The 2010 legislative session concluded in breathtaking fashion with a one-day special session that resulted in closing the \$3 billion budget gap with an interesting combination of cuts, payment shifts, and other features that will frame the gubernatorial debate this fall and set up a titanic clash to address a projected \$5.7 billion budget deficit when the new governor and legislature take office next January.

This special two-part update will give you first an insider's view of the negotiations that led to the agreement and an examination of the agreement itself, while part II will name the winners and losers of the agreement.

Next week, we'll take a retrospective look at the session in total.

PART I: INSIDE THE AGREEMENT

Editor's Note: The following is based upon first-hand and other descriptions provided by Watchdog sources inside the Capitol on both sides of the aisle.

The negotiations began in earnest with a conference call among legislative leaders on Friday evening, May 14th with Governor Pawlenty away from the Capitol at the fishing opener.

Up to that time, budget negotiations were being handled at a lower level, with Representative Lyndon Carlson (DFL-Crystal) representing the House majority, Senator Dick Cohen (DFL-Saint Paul) representing the Senate majority, and Chris DeLaForest (Director of Legislative Affairs) and Commissioner Tom Hanson (Department of Finance) representing the administration.

Talks were stalled out because the DFL was insisting that none of the proposed budget cuts be extended into the next budget cycle, which would have reduced the whopping \$5.7 billion projected deficit by nearly \$1 billion. The DFL negotiators intimated that extending the reductions forward was unpalatable to the majority of their rank and file.

During the call, DFL leaders urged the Governor to return to Saint Paul to begin negotiations in earnest at the leadership level. Pawlenty agreed, and a meeting was scheduled for Saturday afternoon May 15th.

The leadership negotiations immediately focused on a number of issues:

1. Should spending reductions be moved forward into next budget cycle or only be effective for the current cycle?

2. How to address a \$408 million "hole" the DFL was proposing to fill with tax increases by not relying on new federal "FMAP" monies that haven't passed Congress.
3. Whether or not to participate in "early enrollment" of certain people under Medicaid, the so-called "Obamacare" provision.
4. Whether or not to agree to hospital and other medical "surtaxes."
5. Increasing funds and other changes to the GAMC medical program.

Negotiations throughout Saturday evening dragged on without much movement on either side, with the DFL threatening a "dual track" strategy whereby they would bring forward their own budget bill to the floor of both houses for a vote, even though other budget bills with tax increases had been earlier vetoed by Pawlenty.

True to their word, the DFL brought up a budget bill that contained the medical surtaxes at dawn on Sunday. The bill passed with no Republican support save for Senator Steve Dille (R-Dassel) who is retiring. It was obvious the DFL budget bill was dead on arrival.

There was little action on Sunday morning as both camps plotted their next moves and attempted to get some rest.

The DFL then called a meeting for 3PM on Sunday with only 9 hours left to strike a deal.

It was clear to participants that the House and Senate DFL leaders were at odds with each other as well as Pawlenty. At one point Speaker Margaret Kelliher walked off from negotiations muttering about "double crossing," a clear reference to Senate Majority Leader Larry Pogemiller.

Nonetheless, the parties continued to push forward. Pawlenty insisted that the state not participate in the "early enrollment" and that the medical surtaxes be dropped, which the DFL insisted upon.

During the evening, health care negotiators struck a deal regarding GAMC that would add some money to the program and place caps on the number of enrollees at each hospital.

At the leadership table, negotiations quickly turned to the "early enrollment" issue and crafting language that would allow a middle ground position whereby both the current governor and his successor would be given authority to participate in early enrollment via executive order.

At approximately 10 PM on Sunday night, an agreement was struck by the parties. The late hour of the agreement meant a special session would need to be called as there wasn't enough time left to process the bill during the regular session.

Moreover, the key "early enrollment" language was still undergoing revisions via shuttle diplomacy between the parties.

At midnight, Pawlenty called a special session and the lieutenants went to work finalizing details into the early morning hours.

By early morning, the details of the agreement had been worked out with the exception of the early enrollment language. A leadership meeting was immediately called and the Big Three worked to salvage the agreement as everything hinged on the early enrollment language.

At approximately 8AM, the language was agreed upon and non-partisan staff went to work incorporating the final language into the bill to prepare it for a final vote. Time was ticking away and not an ally.

As the minutes and hours ticked away, one Republican legislator was working hard to scuttle the deal and sow doubt among colleagues. Rep. Jim Abeler (R-Anoka) was convinced that the deal was bad for Republicans, even though the vast majority of his caucus, the governor, and GOP observers believed the GOP got a damn good deal under the circumstances.

And while the DFL could easily supply the votes to pass the bill in the House, GOP support was needed to give the deal the credibility to the public at large.

Late in the morning, key staff members decided to have Pawlenty himself address the House GOP Caucus just prior to the final floor vote.

Pawlenty masterfully explained the agreement and the GOP "wins" within and appealed to the caucus for support. Abeler could only offer a weak defense of his position and the deal was sealed.

A short time later, the budget agreement passed both the House and Senate on a bi-partisan basis and was sent on to the Governor.

Governor Tim Pawlenty signed the bill this past Friday morning, making it the law of the land.

TOMORROW: WHAT THE DEAL CONTAINS; WINNERS AND LOSERS.

E-mail Update 5/25/10

In This Issue:

SPECIAL UPDATE - SESSION REVIEW

PART II: THE AGREEMENT; WINNERS AND LOSERS

Yesterday in Part I, the Watchdog gave readers an exclusive view of the negotiations that led to the agreement. Today, we examine the components of the agreement, and more importantly, declare the winners and losers of this historic budget agreement.

THE AGREEMENT

Remember that the problem to be solved was in the range of a \$3 billion deficit. Approximately \$500 million of the problem was what was left to be resolved from the current 2010 deficit of \$1 billion. \$500 million was resolved in March through the "phase I" deficit reduction bill, leaving \$500 left to be fixed.

On top of that was roughly \$2.5 in unallotments that were invalidated by the wrongly decided Minnesota Supreme Court opinion. Of the \$2.5 billion, about \$1.7 billion was a payment shift in K12 aid and about \$700 million were actual spending reductions.

Roughly, the budget agreement accounted for the \$3 billion in the following way:

- Ratify the \$1.7 billion in school payment shifts;
- Ratify \$700 million in spending reductions, primarily from 2009;
- Taking another \$600 million in one-time monies and shifts.

Plainly, this agreement is comprised mainly of payment shifts and one-time monies that do nothing to reduce the projected deficit in the next budget cycle.

For the current budget cycle, things look good, with a small surplus of \$6 million left on the bottom line.

For the next fiscal cycle, the deficit is projected to be a whopping \$5.7 billion. The only saving grace is that the state did not book potential federal aid of \$408 million, meaning this money will fall to the bottom line if it shows up next year.

Beyond the money, the two other major components of the deal included an agreement to tweak the GAMC health care reform agreed to earlier in session as well as the Medicaid "early enrollment" agreement whereby Pawlenty and his successor can choose unilaterally to sign up.

So who won and who lost in the deal?

GOVERNOR TIM PAWLENTY: WINNER

Out of all the Capitol players, Pawlenty was the biggest winner.

For Pawlenty, the odds were stacked against him from the start of the legislative session. A lame duck, he faced an overwhelming and angry DFL legislative majority intent on scoring a win against him after 7 years of Pawlenty victories. The need for a DFL win was even more important after Pawlenty revealed nascent presidential ambitions and House Speaker Margaret Kelliher won the DFL endorsement for governor.

Pawlenty was then dealt a near-fatal blow when the Minnesota Supreme Court ruled his summer 2009 unallotments illegal, giving even more momentum to the DFL in the waning yet critical last days of the 2010 legislative session.

For TPaw, the situation was desperate yet he won and won big.

First and foremost, Pawlenty resolved a \$3 billion budget deficit without raising taxes or getting caught in the "fee" trap, where he was caught in 2005 after agreeing to a "health impact fee." This was a major accomplishment and preserved Pawlenty's brand as a tax fighter.

Second, the agreement ratified all of his 2009 unallotment actions that were deemed illegal by the Supreme Court. This was a major victory for TPaw as well. Remember that the unallotment lawsuit only dealt with one small spending reduction, about \$5 million from a dietary supplement program. All the remaining parties who were impacted by the unallotment ruling were waiting in the wings to go to court to claim their judgment, which they would have won and which would have put the state into default as the money is unavailable to pay the judgments. The prospect of the state unable to pay its bill would have been a big embarrassment to a governor trying to prove his managerial credentials to a national audience. Frankly, it's a bit puzzling that the DFL didn't push for more at the bargaining table when they could clearly see they had the Governor in a box on this issue.

And by the way, now that the state has a balanced budget, the unallotment power is restored to help the next governor resolve the \$5.7 billion projected deficit next year.

Third, Pawlenty successfully avoided signing up for "Obamacare" under early Medicaid enrollment and also avoided the medical surtaxes the DFL wanted. Pawlenty has been a clear critic of Obamacare and he will continue to have credibility on the issue.

Fourth, Pawlenty avoided a special session and has now freed up his summer to travel and explore future political opportunities.

For Pawlenty, the only loss was the inability to make further spending reductions or move them into the future budget cycle, meaning a massive projected budget deficit will for the next biennium will be used against him and Republicans next year.

Given the circumstances, it is hard to imagine a better outcome for Governor Pawlenty.

SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE MARGARET ANDERSON KELLIHER: LOSER

Kelliher's strategic mistake was made back in February when she decided to continue on as House Speaker. In that role, it was a certainty that she would have to make compromises with Pawlenty in order bring the budget issue to resolution.

The budget chickens came home to roost and Kelliher's candidacy is the worse for it.

First, Kelliher failed to deliver on the budget agreement despite having a decisive majority in the House and time on her side. While a special session would have harmed her and her caucus to some extent, time favored her in a special session as her liberal allies would no doubt have turned up the heat by going to court to claim judgments from the unallotment lawsuit.

In addition, she made her members vote for massive tax increases that never became law. The result is that these votes served no purpose other than to give Republicans campaign fodder to paint vulnerable DFL House members as tax and spenders at a time the electorate is fed up with tax increases.

There is really little Kelliher can say her side won in the budget agreement. There were no tax increases, no change to the GAMC reform issue she sought, no early expansion of Medicaid, and no health care surtaxes. On the major issues, Pawlenty won them all.

Moreover, Kelliher will also own the fact that very little was done to reduce the \$5.7 billion structural deficit in the next bi-ennium. Throughout the campaign, she will have to explain what she will do to erase a projected deficit she helped create. She will be forced to admit to her base that severe budget cuts will part of the mix, all to the benefit of Mark Dayton.

In a general election, she will have to admit to deficit hawk independents that she created a massive budget deficit that will, in her mind, require at least some tax increases to resolve.

The best Kelliher can claim are two small victories in that there will be no special session and that the compromise language on early enrollment will allow her to enroll the state, if she can win the election. There is no doubt that Pawlenty will decide against enrolling in the program, meaning the only part left in the agreement is the ability of his successor to opt in.

Avoiding special session does allow her and her troops to claim they got done in a timely fashion and allow them to get home to campaign in what will undoubtedly be a touch environment for Democrats.

For those two small victories, Kelliher essentially traded away the farm to Pawlenty.

The bottom line is that when both sides were staring down the prospect of a lengthy special session, Kelliher blinked. She looked weak and indecisive when she most needed to demonstrate her leadership credentials. This is especially true for a female candidate who must prove to skeptical voters that she has the moxie to hang tough in the rough and tumble world of high level politics.

SENATE MAJORITY LEADER LARRY POGEMILLER: WINNER

The Dog declares Pogemiller a winner even though his report card is a bit more mixed than Pawlenty's.

Pogemiller is a winner primarily for two reasons. First, he was able to inflate the next biennium deficit to an astonishing \$5.7 billion. This large number positions Pogemiller, who likely return as Senate Leader, to call for tax increases while at the same time blaming Pawlenty and his no-new-taxes stance for the problem. Pogemiller will find much value in casting Pawlenty as a failed leader who left a mess to clean up.

Second, the Watchdog will acknowledge that Pogemiller does have a sincere interest in preserving state political institutions. Pogemiller knew Pawlenty would refuse to cooperate in any legal judgments against the state this summer and a constitutional crisis would be the likely outcome. Pogemiller thus had an interest in avoiding a showdown that would have possibly put the state into crisis.

Third, Pogemiller also had an interest in getting his troops out of the Capitol and home to campaign in a tough environment.

In the loss column, Pogemiller failed in his ultimate quest to get Pawlenty to agree to a tax increase and thereby make him tacitly admit that tax increases are needed to balance the state budget.

Also, he has vulnerable members who are facing tough reelection prospects who will have to answer tough questions about failed tax increases and a failure to address a future deficit.

Having said that, Pogemiller is fairly well positioned after realizing his most favored course of action wasn't going to become reality.

LEGISLATIVE REPUBLICANS AND TOM EMMER: WINNERS

Like Pawlenty, Republicans can claim a victory in fighting off tax increases while tarring DFLers with the multiple tax increases they passed over their opposing votes.

Moreover, the Medicaid early enrollment language allows Republicans to clearly frame the gubernatorial debate as one in which there is a clear choice regarding Obamacare, which isn't popular anywhere.

With the next governor given unilateral power to enroll in early expansion, Tom Emmer can draw a clear and favorable distinction between himself and Kelliher. Simply put, Emmer can be the anti Obamacare candidate while Kelliher is clearly the pro Obamacare candidate.

Also, the GAMC healthcare reform act took an out of control entitlement program that was headed for bankruptcy and put strict financial controls on it by introducing true healthcare reform. Republicans can run on this issue this fall and win with it. The DFL utterly failed in the health care battle this year.

Finally, the massive projected deficit is an opportunity for the Republicans to blame the DFL and Kelliher for a lack of attention to the problem while also allowing them the opportunity to paint the fiscal situation as an opportunity to truly reform government, not just nibble around the edges.

In this environment, the outcome favors Republicans.

LEGISLATIVE DEMOCRATS: LOSERS

About all these folks can claim in the way of victory is that they got out of town on time.

Despite large majorities in both houses, they ratified Pawlenty's unallotment decisions, voted on tax increases that didn't become law, and were forced to swallow defeat on the health care front when the GAMC reform became law but their cherished early enrollment initiative failed to become law.

And while they think they won a victory by limiting spending reductions to the current budget, they really lost in the long run. Given the size of the deficit, spending cuts must be part of the mix next year, even if the DFL runs the table in the elections (doubtful!).

They had a chance to reduce the projected deficit and blame Pawlenty. Now, those who return are facing the prospect of cutting and there may be no straw man to blame.

On the big issues, legislative democrats got rolled and now they get to go home and face an angry electorate as well as a dispirited base that is disappointed in the lack of progress.

E-mail Update 6/1/10

In This Issue:

EDITOR'S NOTE: The Watchdog publishes this update one day late as we paused to observe Memorial Day 2010 yesterday, our regular publication day. The Watchdog honors the memory of those warriors who have made the ultimate sacrifice to defend our freedoms.

1. Roasting Tom Snell;
2. Rotting Fish in Fridley;
3. Local Government has Money for Lobbyists.
4. Farewell to Scott LeDoux

ROASTING TOM SNELL

MetroNorth Chamber of Commerce Executive Director and honorary Good Ol' Boy Tom Snell was given a formal send off last week in the form of an old fashioned roasting. Of course, the roasting was more of a simmering as the roasters were a roster of overly tame duds afraid to truly bring out the flamethrower for a man who truly deserved a roasting with napalm.

Since Watchdog Presidente for Life Harold Hamilton wasn't invited to rock the mic on Snell's behalf, Hamilton offers his observations based on decades of watching Snell in action.

Tom, your desk must be absolutely filthy. You still haven't found that Northstar rail study you claimed proved that Northstar is world's first cost-effective commuter rail system. Keep looking!

Tom, like other retired men, you should take a shot on "Dancing with the Stars." I've watched you tap dance around issues for years and no one does it better. You could show Buzz Aldrin and Tom DeLay a move or three!

Tom must have really ticked off Dan Erhart because Tom is the only opinion leader in the County I can think of who didn't end up with a "consulting" contract with County government after retiring.

I am well aware that Tom's adult life has been sometimes less than faithful to free market economics and limited government. (Ahem, college days at Augsburg ring a bell?). The wonderful thing about retirement is that one has time to read and reflect. To that end, I will be sending Tom a complementary copy of "Economics in One Easy Lesson," a classic primer on the subject of free markets. Enjoy, Tom!

In closing, I want to sincerely thank Tom for his friendship and hard work over these many years. While Tom and I have always had some friendly disagreements, there can be no argument that Tom was a passionate and tireless worker on behalf of the

MetroNorth Chamber and the county as a whole. He will be sorely missed and I hope that he will continue to put his talents to work in his next endeavor.

Good luck, my friend! My door is always open.

ROTTING FISH IN FRIDLEY

State Senator Satveer Chaudhary (DFL-Fridley) has really got his head in a political vice these days.

As has been reported in other media outlets, Chaudhary had an amendment inserted into a game and fish bill in the waning hours of the recently concluded legislative session that provided for special fishing regulations on a lake where he owns a cabin.

The result has been a firestorm of controversy for the long-time legislator. Chaudhary recently faced a hostile group of DFL activists that did little to quell the storm. The result of last week's meeting was that another meeting will be held later this month to consider whether or not to strip him of his DFL endorsement for Senate.

This is no small matter for the local DFL in Fridley and Chaudhary. The Watchdog spoke with DFL activists in the area (yes, we have DFL friends!) and they are quite upset about the incident. For some, the matter showed an arrogance that doesn't play well in this blue collar district and especially doesn't play well in a political environment where voter anger over the appearance of special favors and bailouts has boiled over. While this incident certainly doesn't rise to the level of what has transpired in Washington, it nonetheless feeds an anger that isn't confined to conservative Tea Party activists. Many DFLers, especially the old Reagan Democrats, feel that their elected officials have ignored them as well.

This feeling was exacerbated by what some of these people saw as Chaudhary's lack of humility and remorse. According to one DFL activist, the senator was more defiant than contrite, which killed his chances of ending the controversy immediately and avoiding a reconsideration of his endorsement.

Overall, it appears Senator Chaudhary has got some big fences to mend if he is to retain his endorsement. Even if he loses it, it's hard to see how another DFLer will step in. Filing for this senate seat closes at 5PM today and so far no other DFLers have filed. As distasteful as his fishing expedition was, the Dog thinks Chaudhary will keep his endorsement with a big piece of his backside chewed out.

Moreover, Republicans have only a small chance to take this seat, no matter who the DFLer is on the ballot. Senate District 50 has gone DFL in every major race over the last ten years with the exception of Tim Pawlenty in 2002, when he beat Roger Moe in the district 43-39, with an assist from Tim Penny, who siphoned off nearly 14% of the vote from those Reagan Democrats mentioned above.

But in the era of Scott Brown, Chaudhary needs to be looking over his shoulder.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT HAS MONEY FOR LOBBYISTS

Well, well, well. It's that time of year when our State Auditor reports on how much money our local units of government have spent on lobbyists and lobbying-related activity. You know, the same crew that complains they don't have money to fix roads or arrest dope dealers has money to hire lobbyists to beg money from other branches of government, which is all our tax dollars anyway.< /p>

These reports are always one year behind, so this report covers 2009 reported expenses.

And wouldn't you know it? Local government spent 4% more on lobbyists in 2009 than they did in 2008. These local units spend approximately \$8.8 million on lobbying. Moreover, they spent another \$10 million plus on dues to organizations that lobby on their behalf as well.

So where did Anoka County and friends place on this hall of shame?

Shockingly, Anoka County, which is usually in the top 5 or even top 3, fell to number 6. The county reported spending \$188,545, which is lower than past years perhaps because the Northstar train is done and the Vikings stadium won't be in Anoka County. Nonetheless, being in the top 10 is still unacceptable.

But that number can be misleading.

Consider that the county also spent nearly \$50,000 as the Regional Rail Authority and that they County also spent \$161,000 on dues for organization that lobby at the Capitol, like the Association of Minnesota Counties or the Minnesota Inter-County Association.

Anoka County is also one of the few local units that uses both contract lobbyists and staff lobbyists, with former state Rep. Kathy Tingelstad being one of them.

The bottom line is that the County is still spending hundreds of thousands of dollars on lobbyists while they whine that they have cut to the bone. Here's a tip for the County: fire every lobbyist, staff and contract, before you cut one more dollar from another program. Only then will you have any credibility.

If the County needs a presence at the Capitol, send the seven commissioners, all of whom earn about \$65,000 for a part-time job. There are thousands of taxpayers who would gladly spend time at the Capitol for \$65,000 per year, plus benefits.

Cities in Anoka County didn't hire their own lobbyists but did pay dues in 2009 to belong to organizations that lobbied on their behalf.

Selected city expenditures were as follows:

Andover: \$48,255
Anoka: \$19,146
Blaine: \$105,941
Coon Rapids: \$89,541
Fridley: \$24,577
Ham Lake: \$10,940
Lino Lakes: \$13,817

In Anoka County, Blaine, Coon Rapids, and Andover all paid high dues compared to other cities. How many cops could these cities have hired instead of lobbyists?

Watchdogs, when these candidates for city council and county commissioner come to your door to ask for your vote, ask them what they're going to do regarding lobbying expenditures, especially at the county level. We know we will.

FAREWELL TO SCOTT LEDOUX

Anoka County Commissioner Scott LeDoux recently resigned his District 5 seat. Yes, LeDoux was frequently an opponent of the Watchdog but he was never an enemy. We wish Scott the very best as he battles ALS.

E-mail Update 6/7/10

In This Issue:

1. Chamber Chooses Former DFL Staffer for Leader.
2. County Commissioner Races a Potential Sea Change.

CHAMBER CHOOSES FORMER DFL STAFFER FOR LEADER

Last week, the Watchdog sent MetroNorth Chamber of Commerce executive director Tom Snell off to retirement with a special roast of our own.

We noted somewhat tongue-in-cheek Tom's occasional DFL leanings and his less than enthusiastic support of free markets and limited government.

With the selection of Lori Higgins to replace Snell as Chamber head, it looks like the Democrat apple didn't fall far from the tree. Given the make-up of the search committee, however, this result isn't surprising.

You see, Higgins is a former staffer for liberal DFL Congressman Bill Luther, working as both a project manager and a deputy district director.

Of course, the Chamber engaged in the all-too-typical chicanery we've come to expect by only noting in the press release that Higgins worked for a "Minnesota congressman," failing to note that it was a liberal DFL Congressman.

Compare the chicanery of the Chamber press release to mainstream journalistic outlets that clearly noted Higgins' partisan staff work.

This is precisely the kind of information suppression and lack of transparency that has led to a serious reduction in the Chamber's credibility, especially amongst Republican and conservative members who strongly believe in lower taxes, less regulation, and a less intrusive government, which are all anathema to the DFL.

The Watchdog can't help but wonder if the Chamber asked Higgins about her role in developing and executing the liberal policies that defined Luther's tenure in Congress. For example, from 1999-2002, Luther averaged a paltry 29% approval rating from the Taxpayer's League of Minnesota, voting numerous times against tax cuts and spending reductions.

Moreover, the Chamber hopefully asked Higgins if she was involved in Luther's 2002 re-election bid. Readers will recall the Luther campaign was caught engaging in dirty politics when Luther supporter Sam Garst put his name on the ballot under the "No New Taxes" Party in an effort to siphon votes away from John Kline, Luther's GOP opponent.

The move backfired and Kline won anyway. The Pioneer Press said this about the affair:

Unlike the earlier contests, the 2002 race proved particularly nasty. Luther's campaign manager encouraged a third-party candidate, Sam Garst of the "No New Taxes Party," to file in order to draw votes away from Kline. The move, initially denied by Luther's camp, was denounced by Republicans and prompted Luther to apologize for his manager's actions. Stassen-Berger, Rachel E., "Luther apologizes for Garst's filing" *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, Sept. 28, 2002⁽¹²⁾

The bottom line is that while the Watchdog hopes that Higgins proves herself an able advocate for business interests across Anoka County, her partisan background raises questions that have yet to be answered to the Chamber membership, including the Anoka County Watchdog.

The Watchdog calls upon Higgins to explain to the rank and file membership her views regarding free markets, the role of government in regulating business, and her involvement, if any, in partisan politics. The integrity of the Chamber and its leadership demand nothing less.

COUNTY COMMISSIONER RACES A POTENTIAL SEA CHANGE

The filing deadline for political office closed last week as dates on the political calendar were all pushed forward after the legislature accelerated the primary election date from September to August to accommodate federal absentee voting changes.

The passing of the filing deadline revealed who was in and who was out (note Dick Lang is now out), demonstrating that 2010 could be the most influential election at the County level in more than a generation.

Five of the County's seven commissioner seats are up for grabs, with three of the seats open as the incumbents declined to run again. The other two seats are split between the reformer camp and the Good Ol' Boy camp.

Thus, this election is shaping up to be one that will dictate the direction of county government for years to come. Depending upon the outcome, the County will either remain mired in the same old self-serving, arrogant, tax and spend mode or a new era of accountability and transparency will be ushered in by a Board majority of truly dedicated to the common good.

You can count on the Watchdog to bring you candidate statements and other relevant information throughout the election cycle.

In the meantime, here's a preliminary look at all seven seats and the candidates in the four that are on the ballot:

DISTRICT 1: Open Seat

Good Ol' Boy Commissioner and Board Chairman Dennis Berg has decided to retire after decades of supporting tax increases and boondoggles like the Vikings stadium pursuit. Berg liked to talk like a conservative Republican outside the county courthouse but vote like an old school Democrat within. His retirement is welcome news to Watchdogs and should produce a better commissioner, given the areas fiscally conservative leanings.

Four candidates have filed for this seat:

NATALIE HAAS STEFFEN

A former county commissioner and died in the wool, hall of fame member of the Good Ol' Boys club and a current member of the Met Council. There can be little doubt Dennis Berg groomed her to run for the seat again before announcing his retirement. Her election to the seat would mean a vote for the GOB network.

MATT LOOK

The Watchdog is familiar with Look and his fiscally conservative views. A small business owner, Look understands what it means to make payroll and pursue a profit motive. Look also serves on the Ramsey City Council.

ANDY HILLEBREGT

Unknown

TERRY HENDRIKSEN

Not enough information.

DISTRICT 2: Open Seat

Long-time incumbent Dick Lang filed for re-election but withdrew his name soon afterwards. Family considerations apparently led to the decision. Lang was a good natured commissioner who usually voted with the GOB network even though he didn't get along with GOB Commissar Dan Erhart. In the Dog's opinion, Lang was better suited to lead the Anoka County of 1980 than 2010 and its probably for the best to get new blood in the seat.

Five candidates have filed for this seat:

DEBBIE JOHNSON

The soon-to-be former state Senator is well-known in the area and has compiled a solid fiscally conservative voting record in the legislature. Having said that, Johnson earned a reputation during her legislative tenure for lazy campaigning, poor fundraising, and poor constituent services. Johnson would likely vote correctly on the Board. The question is, can she get beyond the August primary in a five person race with that kind of work ethic?

JOLYNN "JOEY" ERIKSON

Joey Erikson, a former Ham Lake city council member, earned a reputation on the council for fiscal conservatism and thoughtful leadership. Erikson also ran

unsuccessfully for this seat once before. Can Erikson turn that failure into success? If so, she would provide another vote for accountable government on the Board.

GARY KIRKEIDE

Kirkeide is the former Mayor of Ham Lake and is a current member of the city council. He has a well-earned reputation as a rock-rib conservative and his no nonsense approach to government. The knock on Kirkeide is his perceived lack of intensity on the campaign trail, as evidenced by his defeat at the hands of current mayor Paul Meunier in race Kirkeide should have easily won. For Kirkeide, he can be successful if he demonstrates to voters that he's in it to win it.

ANDY WESTERBERG

Westerberg is a former Republican legislator and current member of the Metropolitan Airports Commission in the mold of Kathy Tingelstad. Westerberg is probably the closest thing to a Good Ol' Boy candidate in this district. While he will no doubt tout his Republican background and conservative credentials on SOCIAL issues, he frankly has a poor record regarding two issues that will be important to Watchdogs.

First, Westerberg supported Northstar commuter rail. With the tourist train to Duluth on the County's agenda, the last thing Watchdogs need is another commissioner who supports trains.

Second, no one will soon forget his support of a Vikings stadium for Anoka County. Remember, they don't have a stadium site - yet.

When given a chance to stand up to the Good Ol' Boys, Westerberg rolled over.

ERIK EVENSON: Unknown

DISTRICT 3: Robyn West incumbent

Incumbent ROBYN WEST is one of two fiscal conservatives on the Board. While she has on occasion strayed, her overall voting record is sterling, proving her to be a true friend of the taxpayer in Anoka County.

MIKE BOURKE

Bourke is on the Blaine city council and rumored to be a favored candidate of the Good Ol' Boys, especially Dan Erhart.

This race offers a clear, distinct choice.

DISTRICT 4: Jim Kordiak Incumbent

Commissioner JIM KORDIAK stands with Dan Erhart and the Good Ol' Boys.

Kordiak is challenged by GREG SLOAT of Columbia Heights. Beyond that, the Dog knows little of him.

DISTRICT 5: Open seat

Commissioner SCOTT LEDOUX is not seeking re-election and has already resigned his seat while battling a serious illness.

While five candidates have filed for this open seat, none bring a reputation for fiscally accountable conservative government.

CAROL LEDOUX

The de facto incumbent, LeDoux would no doubt bring to the office many of the features the Watchdog disliked in Scott LeDoux's representation. Namely, an attitude that government junkets, dining, and credit card expenditures are an acceptable, even necessary, component of public service that shouldn't be questioned by the taxpayers who foot the bill.

Moreover, both found back room dinner deals to also be a part of "doing business" in the name of government and told the Watchdog as much on numerous occasions.

The Watchdog begs to differ and hopes a candidate is elected to this seat who believes that business should be done at public meetings held in government buildings, not at swanky restaurants after hours.

Would Carol LeDoux charge the government for a toothbrush and candy bar?

BECKY FINK

Fink is an admitted liberal who unsuccessfully sought this seat the last time it was on the ballot.

JULIE TRUDE

Trude is a long-time member of the Andover City Council who has done little to garner an image as a tight fisted guardian of the fisc. On the positive side, she is rumored to dislike the methods of the Good Ol' Boys, especially Dan Erhart. If true, that may be enough to convince Watchdogs she's the one.

DANIEL NELSON

Unknown

MICHAEL ROHRICHT

Unknown

DISTRICT 6: Not on Ballot

Commissioner RHONDA SIVARAJAH represents this district. Rhonda was the first fiscally conservative Board member and has been an uncompromising champion of the taxpayer. Before Robyn West was elected, Sivarajah frequently stood alone on the wrong end of 6-1 votes, refusing to be intimidated. If Board control changes, she is the natural choice to lead the Board.

DISTRICT 7: Not on Ballot

The home of Good Ol' Boy Godfather Dan Erhart. Enough said.

So there you have it, at least as things stand in early June. In three of the five seats, the August primary will winnow the field to two candidates in each seat.

Three open seats among five races means the future of the County is on the line in November.

The Good Ol' Boys are working hard to see that they win. What are YOU doing about it?

E-mail Update 6/14/10

In This Issue:

1. Twins Get Another Subsidy.
2. Legislative Races to Watch.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Don't forget to request your own in-fashion, stylish Anoka County Watchdog T-shirt. With summer here and the parade season in full swing, you can proudly let the world know you're watching how the government spends your hard-earned tax dollars! Order your free shirt at: freetshirt@anokacountywatchdog.com.

MINNESOTA TWINS GET ANOTHER SUBSIDY

At last, we taxpayers have divined the true benefit and value of the heavily-subsidized Northstar Commuter rail line. To reduce rush hour congestion? No. To offer commuter options? Nope. To give commuters who choose to ride the rails a heavily-subsidized ride to work? No and no.

The real value of Northstar rail, at least in terms of popularity, is to give baseball fans a taxpayer subsidy as they travel to and from their chosen leisure time activity.

While Northstar rail continues to fail to meet ridership projections for commuters during rush hour, the train is wildly exceeding expectations when it comes to carting dad and junior down to Target Field for a day of hot dogs and bonding under a bucolic urban sky.

Consider these statistics and anecdotes regarding Northstar's ability to draw riders on weekends and week nights, when there is no traffic on Highway 10 and few people are hustling to work to earn a living.

Nearly 2,000 beer swilling, brat eating fans pack themselves onto the train for each and every home game for which this subsidized service is available. In fact, extra cars have been added to meet the demand after busses were called in before one game to quell the civil unrest that nearly broke out when disappointed fans at the Fridley station learned there was no more room on the train for them and there would be no riding the roof or hanging on the sides of the train. This isn't Bangladesh, after all.

Now, train service is being added for more games and bus service is being added to carry Saint Cloud-based fans down to Big Lake, which will undoubtedly make for less room for Fridley-based fans.

If only the train was as popular when it comes to its intended purpose - transporting commuters to and from work for the ostensible purpose of relieving congestion on Highway 10 during the rush hours.

The real scam Watchdogs must guard against is the one where government will go about adding riders from Twins games to the overall ridership numbers. There is little doubt Twins numbers will greatly inflate the overall numbers so government can brag about the success of the line.

And another thing. The Twins should pay their share of the required taxpayer subsidy. It's bad enough they gouged taxpayers for a new stadium. Now we learn they're getting another subsidy to get their customers to the front door and back home after spending big bucks for over-priced food, drink, and memorabilia.

LEGISLATIVE RACES TO WATCH

The Anoka County Watchdog will occasionally highlight select legislative races from around the area to give readers a better idea of both the candidates involved and the race itself.

Today, the Dog takes a look at a House District that will be a bellwether on election night and just might send a DFL incumbent packing.

HOUSE DISTRICT 49B

This district serves a large portion of Coon Rapids and one precinct in southern Andover.

Like many parts of Anoka County, Coon Rapids is home to people who moved south from the Iron Range in search of better economic opportunities in the Metro.

As such, the district retains a conservative, blue collar flavor that embraces populist economic policies and conservative social values. In other words, this district is a classic "Reagan Democrat" area that can swing from election to election.

The District 49B incumbent is Jerry Newton (DFL - Coon Rapids), a freshman elected in 2008 by a comfortable margin in a year that strongly favored his party.

Although new to the seat, Newton is no stranger to area politics, having run unsuccessfully for the legislature on multiple occasions but also winning election to the Coon Rapids City Council and the Anoka-Hennepin School Board.

Newton won in 2008 not only because it was an open seat in a great year for the DFL. He also won because he portrayed himself as a moderate Democrat favoring moderate policies.

During the campaign, Newton frequently touted the fact that he was a former small business owner and a retired military veteran who espoused the values held by the blue collar conservatives who make up the majority of district voters.

However, a close look at Newton's voting record tells a different story.

During the 2009 legislative session, Newton scored a perfect "zero" rating from the Taxpayer's League of Minnesota.

A score of "zero" put Newton in the company of ultra-liberal legislative stalwarts like Phyllis Kahn and Karen Clark. Even Tom "Tommie the Commie" Rukavina scored a "7."

For a former business owner to fail to support the free market in any way will not escape the attention of Coon Rapids voters of all political stripes who are growing concerned every day about runaway government spending and out-of-control governmental overreach and regulation.

Moreover, Newton also cast social policy votes at odds with district values. Take the abortion issue, for example. Coon Rapids is a staunchly pro-life district where pro-life values transcend partisan politics and play a central role in the how many district residents vote. The area has a strong Catholic community centered on Epiphany Church, one of the largest Catholic parishes in the Metro.

This year, Newton was a deciding vote on an amendment offered on the House floor to ban taxpayer funded abortions in the General Assistance Medical Care (GAMC) program. The amendment, offered by a fellow DFLer, failed on a tie vote of 67-67.

Newton will likely spend time this fall explaining his votes to the district. To the Watchdog, his voting record looks more like one belonging to a Minneapolis liberal than a moderate suburban DFLer who once served in the Army and owned his own small business.

On the Republican side of the ticket, Newton will be challenged by Brandon Peterson, an energetic, fresh face who has already garnered a reputation as a tireless worker who has been door knocking in earnest for some time.

There is reason to believe Peterson can put this seat back in the Republican column.

To begin, the seat has been held in the recent past by Republicans Eldon Warkentin and Kathy Tingelstad.

GOP State Senator Debbie Johnson currently represents the area as well as Republican Congressman Erik Paulsen.

In 2008, Obama won a narrow victory over John McCain in the district by a mere .5% of the vote.

In 2006, the last gubernatorial election cycle, Tim Pawlenty bested Mike Hatch 51-43%.

In 2004, George W. Bush beat John Kerry 52-47%.

In 2002, Norm Coleman beat Walter Mondale 56-41%.

In short, the district has leaned Republican despite the popular misconception that this is DFL turf. In reality, it's a district where many folks will tell you they used to be DFL before the party abandoned their values by lurching to the left.

This is a bellwether district that will be watched closely on election night. If Jerry Newton is sent packing, look for huge Republican gains and perhaps even control of the Minnesota House.

E-mail Update 6/22/10

In This Issue:

1. Of Lazy Rivers and Law Enforcement.
2. The Myth of Government Spending.
3. Legislative Race Analysis #2.

OF LAZY RIVERS AND LAW ENFORCEMENT

Even though the State of Minnesota saw revenue collections exceed projections this past month, it is well documented that nearly every state is facing significant budget shortfalls that will persist for some time. Don't forget that even with a bit of good budget news, Minnesota faces a projected \$5.7 billion deficit in next biennium, which starts July 1st of 2011.

Like the states and the federal government, local units of government are in trouble as well. Even worse, many of these local units face massive pension deficits in addition to operating deficits.

While the Watchdog has explored these budget issues in depth on many occasions, we wanted to remind the taxpayers of these issues as Anoka County has continued to trumpet the latest addition to the County's capital improvement program.

The Watchdog reported last year on the County's plan to issue \$2.6 million worth of debt to build the "lazy river" and other water park funsies that will, in the words of the County, make the water park "multi-generational and multi-age."

And just this week, in the midst of the recession and in the midst of massive governmental budget deficits, the County has cut the ribbon on the project.

We'll let readers decide if they think this is a good use taxpayer dollars and any kind of a spending priority or core function of government.

THE MYTH OF GOVERNMENT SPENDING

The story above and related stories regarding government employee layoffs will surely inspire a familiar cry from liberals everywhere that government spending, either by bureaucrats or the government itself, "stimulates" the economy and juices the wheels of capitalism.

Hence, in the minds of these folks, its wonderful, indeed critical, that government spend money on projects, even of questionable merit like the one above, in order to "get

people to work." This axiom holds true for these folks even if the government spending is deficit spending to be paid back to foreign creditors with interest.

The same mindset also applies to layoffs and downsizing of the government employment rolls. Now that government is starting to lay off folks (while still hiring others, keep in mind), there will be no shortage of liberals who will claim that laying off bureaucrats is shortsighted because they spend money and therefore keep the private sector economy humming.

So how is that working out for all the Keynesians out there? The Obama "stimulus" promised to keep unemployment at 8% or below. Many trillions later, we're mired in persistently high unemployment even though the economy is finally showing some signs of life. It looks like trillions in federal spending only bought us European-style unemployment and a mountain of Chinese IOUs.

A similar claim is made regarding the micro-economic spending of each and every government employee. This wrong-headed theory posits that because bureaucrats spend their salary on "main street," it is penny-wise and pound-foolish to lay them off because the layoff ultimately hurts the private economy.

This is hogwash. Never forget that a bureaucrat can only spend wealth that has already been created. In other words, the bureaucrat spends money that is taxed out of the private economy and re-circulated through the public economy and then back into the private economy.

That dollar spent by a government employee would have been spent regardless by the private taxpayer from whom it was taxed in the first place. Instead of being used to pay a bureaucrat, that dollar would have been invested, spent anyway, or used by private sector businesses to grow their own business, not government.

Because government doesn't create wealth, it can only tax and spend the wealth created by others. This form of money-laundering in no way creates wealth or stimulates the economy. If that were the case, why not have Obama hire millions of folks, pay them each a million in salary, and really watch the economy take off?

Ultimately, this economic policy like so many others of the Obama administration hurts the economy because it injects uncertainty into the planning process of job creators. Tax increases, ObamaCare, new regulations, and a general disdain for job creators all make for an uncertain business climate. In the midst of this uncertainty, few businesses will be willing to hire on more employees.

LEGISLATIVE RACE ANALYSIS #2

This week's analysis shines the spotlight on House District 53A, which covers portions of both Ramsey and Anoka counties, taking in the southeast corner of Anoka County and portions of northern Ramsey County.

Frankly, this is a House district that ought to be in the hands of a Republican state Representative.

It is solid GOP territory, given the recent electoral history and the fact that Phil Krinkie, one of the most conservative legislators in recent memory, held the seat for many years before losing it in 2006.

The recent voting history of the district shows the Republican tilt:

2008: McCain wins the district over Obama by a slight margin.

2008: Coleman smokes Franken by 15 points.

2006: Pawlenty trounces Hatch by 14 points.

2004: Bush beats Kerry by a comfortable 8 point margin.

2002: Pawlenty crushes Roger Moe by a whopping 22 points.

The incumbent, Paul Gardner, is an extremely liberal legislator whose voting record is at odds with the district. Gardner first won in 2006, beating Phil Krinkie by a razor-thin margin of just 51 votes in a year that saw Republicans take a beating. Moreover, Gardner benefitted from Krinkie's notorious lack of interest in campaigning and constituent services.

Gardner won by a stronger margin when he was re-elected in 2008 by 1,100 votes, a year that saw Republicans take an even stronger beating than 2006. GOP challenger John Kappler was a mediocre candidate, according to local Republican activists as well.

As a legislator, Gardner has compiled an extremely liberal voting record and has authored bills that range from troubling to bizarre.

In addition to the predictable low score from the Taxpayer's League of Minnesota, Gardner has authored a variety of bills that are unreasonably focused on radical environmentalism and certainly evidence a strong belief in governmental regulation as well as a large number of fees.

A sampling of Gardner's work includes bills to:

- Extend "ethnic and cultural" activity authority;
- A requirement that garbage bags be compostable;
- A "product stewardship" bill.

This could (and should) be the year Gardner is retired and the seat put back in GOP hands. The task will be no cakewalk. Give Gardner credit for his hard work and meticulous constituent services. He wants the seat and has demonstrated he'll put in

the work and run a smart campaign that will deemphasize the nutty legislation and poor voting record.

On the other hand, two factors work in favor of a GOP pick up here. First, the district leans Republican and will tilt back that way after two election cycles of headwinds. Finally, Republicans will have a bit of a tailwind, especially in this district.

Second, the Republicans have put up a capable challenger in Linda Runbeck. Runbeck is well-known to Watchdogs as a former state Senator and state Representative, former president of the aforementioned Taxpayers League of Minnesota, and is a small business owner.

Runbeck knows what it takes to run a successful legislative campaign while boasting an impressive resume that includes knowing what it takes to meet a payroll. She is also well-versed in the issues.

On election night, watch this seat closely. If the Runbeck doesn't win, it likely won't be a good night for the GOP. This is a seat the GOP must win if it is to have a prayer of taking a majority in the Minnesota House.

E-mail Update 6/28/10

In This Issue:

1. Anoka-Hennepin School District Doesn't Get It.
2. Lino Lakes Joins the Immigration Debate.
3. Senator Chaudhary's Day of Judgment.
4. Legislative Race Analysis #3.

ANOKA HENNEPIN SCHOOL DISTRICT DOESN'T GET IT

The Anoka-Hennepin School District, like most local government entities, has yet to grasp the full magnitude of the economic downturn. While the district has nibbled around the edges of financial reform and spending reductions, there has been no real reform so far.

As such, it isn't at all surprising that the district continues to face budget deficits for the foreseeable future.

And it's just as predictable that the district and its apologists by proxy would blame the problem on - you guessed it - a lack of money. If only the district had more money all would be well.

The latest round of this blame game showed up in the past week's addition of the Anoka County Union in the form of a letter to the editor from Roger Johnson. Johnson is well known to Watchdogs as a retired educator, unsuccessful wannabe politician, and hardcore liberal.

Johnson's LTE seeks to frame the education funding debate as a false choice between funding an ever more expensive status quo or slashing services provided to students. Johnson's rhetoric indignantly demands to know "what one-quarter of the Anoka-Hennepin School District should disappear?"

No, the real problem with the district is that its leadership has refused to demonstrate the political courage needed to truly reform the budget.

The vast majority of school district expenses are devoted to pay and benefits for employees. Education is a labor-intensive activity that deploys a large degree of human capital.

Thus, true reform is tied directly to reforming pay and benefit structures.

So when was the last time district employees took a pay cut? Taxpayers in the private sector have absorbed pay cuts through this recession. Moreover, when was the last time pay and benefits were held flat? The answer to both questions is that it hasn't happened for a long, long time.

The first place to start regarding reform is to cut compensation or at least hold it flat (including health care and retirement benefits) until the economy heals.

Second, the school board needs to get serious about reforming the gold-plated retirement packages. Retiring at 55 with a lifetime of Cadillac retirement benefits is unheard of in the private sector, where defined-benefit packages have been replaced with defined-contribution plans.

Just school district finances, teacher retirement finances are in dire straits as well. Watchdogs will recall the recent bailouts of the Minneapolis teacher retirement fund and the Duluth teacher retirement fund. The main teacher retirement fund continues to be underfunded as well, with liabilities outstripping assets. Bailouts of the teacher retirement system are becoming all too common.

If school districts like Anoka-Hennepin want taxpayer buy in, they ought to show some initiative by reforming the retirement system, raising the retirement age and tying pension increases to the health of the fund. In addition, it is time to start transitioning new teacher hires onto a defined-contribution plan just like the rest of us.

Next, school boards should get serious about supporting true education reform. School boards need to actively support reform initiatives like alternative licensure, tenure reform, and holding teachers accountable by tying pay to student results.

Finally, school districts need to show results, just like taxpayers need to at their jobs. The Anoka-Hennepin School District has consistently poor standardized test scores that demonstrate that many students aren't ready to compete in the global marketplace.

The Great Recession and a renewed interest in education reform measures has created an historic moment in the education debate. Voters have a keen interest in spending and accountability reform like never before.

If the Anoka-Hennepin School Board is going to garner the support of the citizens it serves, it needs to turn away from defending the status quo and aggressively pursue honest, meaningful reform. Time and history are not on the side of the protectors of the status quo. Change is coming because the current structure will be eaten alive by unsustainable spending and a global educational marketplace that will render the current government school monopoly model obsolete within a few short years, despite the inherent barriers to change engendered in any monopolistic model.

The good news is that this is the only good "change" we've seen since the term gained so much traction in 2008.

We also think November 2010 will bring some "change" as well!

LINO LAKES JOINS IMMIGRATION DEBATE

The City of Lino Lakes has joined the immigration debate sweeping the nation by proposing that the city adopt English as the official language of the city.

The measure, sponsored by councilman Dave Roeser, is purported to save the city money by requiring that documents only be published in one language.

Given that the city doesn't publish documents in any language other than English right now makes the stated motive somewhat suspect.

While the Dog cannot know the motives for offering the proposal, we do understand that many citizens and their elected officials are rightly angry that the Obama administration has screwed up the immigration issue like it has so many others.

America has a rich tradition of legal and orderly immigration. The current anarchy on the U.S.-Mexican border is illegal and disorderly - and dangerous.

Until our borders are secure and safe, the Obama administration will continue to see Americans express their anger through measures like the Arizona law.

The Community Organizer in Chief truly has the reverse Midas touch. Whatever he handles turns to s**t.

SENATOR CHAUDHARY'S DAY OF JUDGEMENT

Local DFL activists will gather in Senate District 50 tonight to decide the political fate of Senator Satveer Chaudhary. The DFL state Senator has been embroiled in controversy for slipping an amendment onto a bill that would have benefitted a lake on which he owns a cabin.

Chaudhary is being challenged by former DFL House member Barb Goodwin.

Sources tell us different things based upon their allegiance to either of the candidates.

In any case, the Dog says Chaudhary looks to be in trouble, given the anti-incumbent mood and the ties Goodwin has to the local DFL party

Regardless of the outcome, the seat will stay in DFL hands. The index is simply too high to elect a Republican. Put another way, if the GOP wins this seat a la Scott Brown, it's going to be a Republican landslide.

LEGISLATIVE RACE ANALYSIS #3

This week's race takes a look at a state Senate seat, this one in District 49.

The district is solid GOP territory, but merits a closer look because it is an open seat that became open through controversy while the DFL challenger is a solid candidate.

The seat is currently held by Debbie Johnson, who first won the seat in 2000 after incumbent Paula Hanson stepped down.

After winning both the GOP endorsement and election in 2000, 2002, and 2006, Johnson was denied endorsement in 2010 when upstart newcomer Michelle Benson soundly defeated her for the endorsement despite Johnson having heavy backing from establishment Republicans.

As reported by the Watchdog this past spring, Johnson fell out of favor with delegates for her perceived lack of involvement and poor constituent services.

Again, the district is fairly solid GOP territory, having gone Republican in every major race of late except the Mark Kennedy - Amy Klobuchar race for U.S. Senate. But then again, Klobuchar won nearly every precinct in the state in that race.

This race is an uphill climb for the DFL, especially in this environment. Having said that, the GOP could be surprised if things fall into place for the DFL.

First, the DFL would need to count on Benson turning in a poor performance. A lack of strong campaigning and poor fundraising, combined with the low name recognition of a first time candidate could give the DFL a boost here.

That, however, looks doubtful. Benson is running hard and knocking thousands of doors while spending a good deal of time raising money. Benson also benefits from the mentorship of state Rep. Peggy Scott, who won big in 2008 and combines campaign savvy with a great work ethic.

The DFL also admittedly has a good candidate in Ham Lake Mayor Paul Meunier.

The DOG readily acknowledges that Meunier is hard working candidate. He demonstrated those credentials when he outhustled and surprised incumbent Mayor Gary Kirkeide.

Moreover, Meunier is smart and savvy. He is a liberal through and through but he's smart enough to know that his brand of politics isn't popular in the district. He's very skilled at avoiding questions and tap dancing around difficult issues. He's tough to pin down and is good at the retail politics of doorknocking.

It will be much harder, however, to avoid taking stands on high profile issues in a state Senate race where candidate questionnaires, interest group endorsements, and hot button social issues arise in ways not seen in a mayoral race.

On the whole, if Benson does her homework and works hard, she will prevail on election night. If not, the GOP will be looking at being in the minority in Saint Paul for a long time to come.

E-mail Update 7/5/10

In This Issue:

SPECIAL JULY 4TH HOLIDAY EDITION.

EDITOR'S NOTE: This week's holiday edition features a speech Watchdog founder Harold Hamilton was invited to give at a special panel sponsored by the prestigious Heritage Foundation .

The remarks remind us of what Benjamin Franklin said to a woman who asked what the founding fathers had produced at the Constitutional Convention. Said Franklin, "A democracy; if you can keep it."

JOB CREATION AND DESTRUCTION

Recent polls indicate that the high unemployment of almost 10% is one of the biggest problems facing the country. Actual unemployment may be as high as 17% due to people who have dropped out of the labor market and are no longer looking for jobs.

As a result, it is not just creating jobs that is important but also reducing the number of job losses that is important.

Many of the job losses over the years are due to mistakes by the Federal Government. Going back to 1930, the Smoot Halley Tariffs were imposed which raised the cost of imported goods from other countries. These countries compensated by increasing tariffs on our exports. This resulted in job losses.

The Federal Reserve raised interest rates in the early 30s and this, along with the trade problems, threw our economy into a depression which lasted for ten years. During this ten year depression, the unemployment was as high as 25%. A number of unwise policies by the Federal Government, such as price controls, also compounded the problem. This is all described in detail in a book called "The Forgotten Man" by Amity Shlaes.

During the 70s, price controls were imposed on the economy which resulted in high inflation. Most of us will never forget the gas lines at service stations. Who can forget the WIN (Whip Inflation Now) buttons from the Ford Administration? High inflation is one of the most insidious taxes on the economy. As a result of all of the problems with the economy in the 70s, Paul Volker, the new Federal Reserve Chairman in 1980, imposed high interest rates on the economy to break the back of inflation. The Fed's Funds Rate went up to around 12% and the bank rates were 21%. This is the rate our company paid in 1981 and 1982. This resulted in an unemployment rate of approximately 12%.

Just to illustrate some of the effects of inflation, a loaf of bread in 1936 cost 8 cents and now costs about \$2.70. A gallon of gas in 1936 cost 10 cents and now costs \$2.70. A new car costs \$780.00 in 1936 and now is about twenty times higher.

It is the severe recessions which cause the large number of lost jobs. The 2008/2009 recession was one of the most severe since the Great Depression in the 30s. This recession was primarily caused by the subprime housing crisis. The subprime housing crisis was primarily caused by the Community Reinvestment Act which passed Congress in 1976. This encouraged mortgage banks to make loans to potential customers even if they had no money to put down. In the late 90s and early 2000, additional measures were taken by Congress to encourage home ownership and as a result the mortgage banks took on many home loans. This large number of home loans were securitized and passed on to Wall Street. When many of these home loans went bad, this caused the '08 crash on Wall Street. These home loan bonds also caused problems all over the world, even in countries such as Norway where municipalities had bought some of these bonds which now turned out to be worthless.

The 2009 stimulus of approximately \$780 billion was meant to stimulate the economy. Unfortunately, most of this was used for pet projects for the democrat party. Very few jobs were created as a result of this stimulus. More recently, Obama care was passed with the hope that this will help spur the economy.

So far during the Obama Administration, 2.6 million jobs have been lost. As a result, we have 14,260,000 who are unemployed.

We're all hearing endlessly about the Gulf oil spill which is attributed to BP. Without doubt, BP deserves the major amount of the blame. However, Federal Government regulators failed to enforce the regulations which were supposed to be imposed on BP. It was not due to lack of regulations which caused the problem, it was due to federal employees being in bed with BP.

So far during the Obama Administration we have had a 1.3 trillion dollar budget deficit. As a result, we are now 13 trillion dollars in debt. Much of this debt is owed to the Chinese. Do the Chinese believe we are a good credit risk? This is beginning to look doubtful.

Since the Obama presidency began, the government has taken over 51% of private industry. This includes the auto industry, some of the health care industry, and financial institutions such as AIG. Today if you go to buy a car, such as a Chevy, you are undoubtedly buying it from the government. If you want healthcare, the government is going to have a lot of say about what you buy. If you want a home loan or insurance and go to AIG, you are in effect, buying it from the government.

At this rate it appears the government is well on its way to owning 75% of private industry.

Some of the mistakes made by the government are and were being made by the Federal Reserve which sets the Federal Reserve Interest Rates. The people at the Federal Reserve have difficulty determining what is going to happen to the economy. The Federal Reserve Interest Rates are set at a level dependant on what the Federal Reserve believes is best for the economy. If it appears the economy is not doing well, the Federal Reserve rates are lowered. If the economy begins to overheat, the Federal Reserve increases the interest rates to bring the economy back into line. The Federal Reserve has made many mistakes in setting these interest rates. One of the most famous economists, Milton Friedman recommended that the Federal Reserve should simply set the interest rates once at a reasonable level and quit making adjustments as they really have no idea what is going to happen to the economy.

What creates jobs and what causes job losses? As indicated above, many of the job losses are caused by mistakes of the Federal Government. This is especially true during a recession. Some recessions are normal but very deep recessions cause major job losses.

The characteristics of a recession are a decrease in consumer confidence and a reduction in consumer and business spending. This causes many job losses which only compounds the problem. As a result, recessions are a major cause of job losses.

Job creation results when the economy is expanding. The economy can be encouraged to expand by low interest rates set by the Federal Reserve and by lower taxes on business and individuals. This results in a more positive outlook for the economy and encourages consumer and industrial spending.

New products and innovation also help create jobs. Companies such as Apple and Microsoft have created millions of new jobs and this has been largely due to innovation. Lower taxes on corporations result in more research and development and more job creation.

The gross domestic product is presently growing very slowly. During May of 2010, 440,000 new jobs were created. However, 400,000 of these were employees for the census. Creating only 40,000 new jobs during the quarter does not help expand the economy very much. There are many more people coming into the job market during this period than 40,000.

At the present time in 2010, local business is certainly increasing. This has been reported by the papers and by the press. During the recession of 2008/2009, our company, Micro Control laid off 32% of our employees. Since the beginning of January, 2010, we have increased employment by 36%. This increase is because of large increases in capital equipment purchased by our customers.

Unfortunately the Obama Administration in 2010, is not doing the things which encourage businesses to expand and consumers to spend. Business can only look

forward to more taxes in 2011 because of the expiration of the Bush tax cuts and a number of other Obama expensive programs such as Obama Care.

Some of the things which companies are doing now which is different from the past, is hiring many more contract employees instead of hiring employees directly on the payroll. The reason companies are doing this is because they fear a downturn in the economy in 2011. Hiring contract employees instead of hiring them directly on the payroll does not give much confidence to the contract employees. After all, they would much rather have a job with less likelihood of termination.

Local bankers are not making the kind of loans to local businesses that one would expect in an expanding economy. Local bankers do not seem to have the kind of confidence in the economy to take on a lot more business. Also, the Obama Administration is not encouraging business loans when they caution bankers to be careful about the kinds of loans they make.

E-mail Update 7/12/10

In This Issue:

1. The Real LeDoux?
2. Anoka-Hennepin Schools are Bad.
3. Jim Abeler Gets Key Endorsement.

THE REAL LEDOUX

Ailing Anoka County Commissioner Scott LeDoux recently resigned his seat on the County Board, prompting an election in District 5 this November.

Among the candidates vying to replace LeDoux is his wife, Carol LeDoux. Wives running to succeed their husbands is nothing new to politics. For example, Muriel Humphrey succeeded Hubert Humphrey, Mary Ellen Otremba succeeded Ken Otremba (MN House), and Yvonne Solon succeeded Sam Solon (MN Senate).

However, all the candidates named above carved out their own identity while maintaining ties to their late spouses.

That certainly is not the case with Carol LeDoux. Take a look at her lawn signs. They appear to be identical to those of Scott LeDoux, the only exception being the omission of "Scott" before "LeDoux."

Otherwise, the lawn signs look to be clones of Scott LeDoux's lawn signs, right down to the boxing gloves at the top of the sign. Same colors, same font, same size, same symbols.

The signs are so similar as to raise the issue of misleading advertising. It could very well appear to some voters that Scott LeDoux is running for re-election.

The same holds true for her campaign web site. The content is as much about Scott LeDoux and their marriage as it is about Carol's candidacy. Moreover, the political content that is found on the web site is suspiciously similar to that found on Scott LeDoux's web site, which now appears to defunct.

It appears that Carol LeDoux is trying to portray herself as the de facto incumbent, which is a classic campaign strategy but one that can backfire if taken too far.

At some point, she will have to establish her own political identity to those voters who want to know what SHE herself represents to the political marketplace. If not, she risks looking like little more than the wife who wants to ride hubby's coattails.

So far, with the primary election less than one month away, Carol LeDoux has appeared to be little more than Scott's Wife.

ANOKA-HENNPIN SCHOOLS ARE BAD

Yes, the Watchdog just said it. We just said what many taxpayers in the Anoka-Hennepin School District are thinking.

The release of the latest standardized reading and math test scores reveals just how little taxpayers are getting in the way of results in this district.

The Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments-II (MCAs) were administered in both reading and math to third through eighth graders while 10th graders were tested in reading only and 11th graders in math only.

Unfortunately, the annual ritual of low test scores continues in District 11.

Overall, 69% of the district's students are proficient in math while 74% are proficient in reading. In other words, 7 out of every 10 students aren't proficient in math while 1 out of 4 don't read too good (irony emphasized).

When individual schools are examined, some of the results are downright horrifying.

Start with our high schools, where it appears students and staff are out to lunch in general.

- At Anoka HS, only 39% are proficient in math;
- At Blaine HS, 40% are proficient in math.

At two of the state's biggest high schools, 60% of the kids aren't proficient in math.

- At Champlin Park, only 42% are proficient in math;
- At Andover HS, it's 54%.

And at the district's high school catering to unwed mothers and recovering substance abusers, Crossroads Alternative, a stunning 97% ARE NOT proficient in math. That's a statistic that compares favorably to inner-city Detroit or any Third World locale.

Can anyone make a case that Crossroads should remain open? Just what are taxpayers getting for their investment here?

math scores at some of the district's elementary schools aren't much better.

- Evergreen Park, 58% are proficient;
- L.O. Jacob 55% proficient.

And while the reading scores were marginally better than math in the aggregate, reading is frankly less important than math. Math concepts underpin the high technology global economy. Nations that best innovate with respect to high technology will be the ones that prosper in the future.

American kids will soon enter the work force and find themselves competing directly with students from China, India, and Europe for coveted math and science-based jobs.

With so many high school students demonstrating that they lack proficiency in math, it is a clear warning sign that the nation is in danger of losing its preeminent position as a leader in technology, thus endangering our position as the world's most prosperous nation.

While this news is certainly unwelcome, it is somewhat encouraging to note that many leaders, including some Democrats, now understand that the inefficiencies and poor results produced by the Government School monopoly and the teacher union cartel put the nation at risk.

America is finally starting to wake up to the fact that competition in education is desperately needed to break up the Monopoly and the Cartel.

Sadly, it looks like yet another cohort of Anoka-Hennepin 11th graders have been shortchanged in the meantime.

JIM ABELER GETS KEY ENDORSEMENT

The hits just keep coming for state Representative Jim Abeler. The Override Six alumnus has most recently burnished his RINO credentials by obtaining the endorsement of one of the Minnesota's largest public employee unions, the Minnesota Association of Professional Employees (MAPE).

MAPE, like all the public employee unions, seeks to insulate their membership to the greatest extent possible from real world employment conditions that confront private sector taxpayers.

Especially in this economy, government workers continue to enjoy pay and benefits unheard of in private employment. MAPE and their legislative allies work hard to protect that status quo.

In the 2010 election cycle, Jim Abeler has the dubious distinction of being the ONLY Republican legislative candidate endorsed by MAPE.

MAPE-endorsed legislators have been screened by the union and no doubt support the union core mission:

Team MAPE supports MAPE friendly candidates and legislation. Our issue priorities include: achieving fair compensation for state employees, fixing our broken health care system, preventing outsourcing and privatization of state services and protecting our pension and retirement benefits.

On the other hand, the Dog has to acknowledge Abeler's steadfast opposition to ObamaCare, including an OpEd in the Star Tribune recently.

That's what we like to see, Rep. Abeler!

Now, how will Abeler reconcile this position with MAPE's support for universal, single-payer government health care?

E-mail Update 7/19/10

In This Issue:

1. Attention Candidates!
2. All the Gravitas of a Puff of Smoke.
3. Tingelstad Turns Coat Yet Again.
4. No, We Won't Praise the County.

ATTENTION CANDIDATES!

Many faithful readers have written us recently asking for detailed information regarding candidates for various offices throughout Anoka County.

While the Watchdog will be publishing a voters' guide for the county commissioner races, we simply don't have the time to construct and publish the questionnaire's that become our voters' guide.

Having said that, our readers make a valid point. Therefore, the Watchdog issues an invitation to all candidates for offices other than county commissioner: send us your statement of candidacy and we'll publish it on our web site. The only rules are that the statement be fewer than 500 words that answers this question: Why should Watchdogs vote for me?

ALL THE GRAVITAS OF A PUFF OF SMOKE

"I'm an enigma, a mystery, a puff of smoke, an illusion."

This is how Scott's Wife, er, Carol LeDoux describes herself on her campaign Facebook page (no word on whether this used to be Scott's Facebook page) in one weird and semi narcissistic post.

In any case, last week the Watchdog ran a story about Scott's Wife's lawn signs looking exactly like Scott's, with the exception of the word "Scott" being covered up like a bad zit on senior photo day.

The story elicited a good deal of feedback from Watchdogs who live in Anoka County District 5, none of it positive for Scott's Wife's campaign.

Many who have some familiarity with election law, particularly the Fair Campaign Practices Act, said they were of the opinion that the signs may be in violation of the law on two counts.

First, it appears that Scott's Wife's campaign finance reports have not reported the signs as an in-kind contribution from Scott's Campaign. Even though they live together, Scott just can't give away his signs. His campaign and her campaign must formally record the transfer as an in-kind contribution from his campaign to hers.

Second, because the signs used to be Scott's, apparently the disclaimer at the bottom of the sign lists an incorrect campaign address. Many have said the signs list an Andover address while Scott's Wife lists her campaign address as one in Coon Rapids.

The Watchdog will be sure to examine the next county commissioner campaign finance reports to see exactly if and how Scott's Wife reported the lawn sign contribution.

Hopefully, her campaign reports will be more accurate than his. Readers will recall that Scott's reports were frequently inaccurate and nearly always supplemented by amendments written by lawyers making excuses for late and inaccurate information on the reports.

Next, many Watchdogs have reported that their friends and neighbors who had supported Scott were confused to find out that he wasn't running for re-election but instead it was Scott's Wife. Some of these readers further reported that while they hosted a Scott LeDoux lawn sign, they never gave permission to Scott's Wife for her lawn sign. Apparently, her campaign has been putting up lawn signs in old Scott LeDoux yards without asking if the owner they supported her campaign.

While Scott's Wife is busy working over his old lawn sign list, she appears to be even busier putting up lawn signs on public property - which is illegal.

Throughout District 5, one can find her lawn sign emplaced on the public right of way next to public streets and thoroughfares. Misses LeDoux, the public property upon which you are placing your lawn signs is owned by the taxpaying public. You have no right to flout the law and make all of us unwilling supporters of your campaign by brazenly putting up lawn sign after lawn sign on public property. Show that you have respect for the law and remove these illegal signs. Breaking the law while seeking to be a lawmaker is the moral equivalent of these DFL legislators who are voting for tax increases while failing to pay taxes themselves.

Maybe in a county that features Dan Erhart and Satveer Chadhaury that's too much to ask.

TINGELSTAD TURNS COAT - YET AGAIN

We're all familiar with the RINO ways of Anoka County lobbyist and former "republican" state Representative Kathy Tingelstad.

Override Sixer, Northstar rail supporter, Twins stadium supporter, and the list goes on. Just when you thought that Tingelstad couldn't renounce her former party any worse, along comes this gem from our friends at Politics in Minnesota:

A Kelliher rep added that fellow Override Sixer Kathy Tingelstad also made an appearance at an MAK event this week.

You heard it right, Watchdogs. DFL-endorsed candidate for governor Margaret Anderson Kelliher's camp confirms that Kathy Tingelstad showed up at a Kelliher event.

Hopefully, the GOP base in Senate District 49 will remember this the next time Tingelstad or her family members want to be elected delegates to Republican Party conventions.

NO, WE WON'T PRAISE THE COUNTY

Ugh, here we go again with the "we've cut to the bone" sob story from yet another local unit of government looking for sympathy from a taxpaying public that has seen massive layoffs and job cuts since the recession bit the economy hard back in 2008.

This time it's Anoka County, which trumpeted the fact that it cut \$2.75 million from its 2010 budget.

The cuts were accompanied by the trite, shopworn bromides that have become so much background noise to beleaguered taxpayers and business owners who have truly cut and cut and cut.

"This will affect the delivery of services," bemoaned Cevin Peterson, County Bureaucrat. And he whined on, noting "This has been a painful process. We are getting pretty lean."

Outgoing Good Ol' Boy Dennis Berg (sure to cop a sweet retirement package) noted sadly, "We have got to the point where all the fat was cut out a long time ago. Now we are cutting out the meat and services are going to be hit."

Fellow Good Ol' Boy Jim Kordiak also somberly observed, "The pain has been shared."

What a crock of BS. So the County cut back a bit on spending. What the amateur reporters at the Anoka County Union didn't mention was that the County's certified 2009 expenditures were over \$321 million. So the County cut back .86% of last year's expenditures. Big damn deal.

The Watchdog knows of Anoka County businesses that cut 25% and even 35% of expenses during the recession just to stay afloat.

The article notes that County departments prepared a "doomsday" budget scenario of 5% cuts. The article went on to note that those "feared deep cuts" were mitigated by the state legislature, which is facing a \$5.7 billion deficit next fiscal biennium.

The article goes on to note that there may be "one or two layoffs" as a result of these superficial cuts. This in a county that employs approximately 2,500 people.

Can these bureaucrats really feel good about their attempt to snow the public under regarding these measly reductions?

The simple fact is that county government continues to live better than those funding the government.

Hopefully, voters will install new leadership this fall that understands that government can't be insulated from reality.

\$2.75 million. BFD.

E-mail Update 7/26/10

In This Issue:

1. The Real Paul Meunier?

THE REAL PAUL MEUNIER?

The Watchdog has written before that current Ham Lake mayor and state Senate candidate Paul Meunier can be evasive. In his short political career, he has earned a reputation in many quarters as an expert in "political speak," a master of avoiding direct answers to tough questions and telling people what they want to hear.

That's likely because when Meunier is forced to finally take a stand on an issue he sometimes ends up on the wrong side of the people he represents. Witness the issue of bringing city sewer and water to Ham Lake.

In other words, he is well suited to the DFL strategy of recruiting candidates to run in the suburbs who, above all else, know how to bob and weave around the tough questions and portray themselves as "moderates" and "mainstream" "problem solvers."

A prime example of this type of DFL candidate is state Representative Jerry Newton, who won his House seat by avoiding a lot of talk on the issues and focusing on his military background and history of owning a small business. The result has been a legislator who has been more anti-business than just about any other legislator in the House. And Newton and Meunier are more politically intertwined than you may think (more on that below).

So it's not surprising in the least to see that Meunier has been recruited to run for the state Senate. Even less surprising to see is that he is running the type of stealth campaign one would expect. Campaign literature, his web site, and his talking points at the door are filled with platitudes, aspirations, rhetoric, and euphorian talk of "a fair chance."

Since the media certainly won't do any homework on this candidacy, it's up to the Watchdog to tell you about this candidate so you can make an informed decision in November whether you will cast your vote for Meunier or Michelle Benson.

WHERE'S THE BEEF, PAUL?

More than anything, voters want candidates to tell them where they stand on the issues. They want to be confident that their legislator is going to tell them how he/she will vote on the important issues and then follow through on that vote in Saint Paul.

So where does Meunier stand on the issues of the day? Where is he on taxes, abortion, government debt, and the burdens our small businesses face?

Who the hell knows? A look at Meunier's much ballyhooed web site tell visitors not one thing about his stand on the issues. Unlike most campaign web sites, his site doesn't even have an "issues" tab. Instead, there is a "principles" tab filled with mumbo jumbo and feel-good talk of some idea he calls "A Fair Chance." Instead of concrete ideas and policy positions regarding jobs, taxes, education, transportation and the like, the entire "principles" section is filled with vapid tripe about the "A Fair Chance" that gives the reader no earthly idea regarding his plan to get Minnesota back on track.

Witness the "principles" underpinning the "jobs" section:

Hard work and personal responsibility pay off when people are given A Fair Chance. Individuals are not restrained to pursue their dreams and provide for their family. Most people recognize that a good job with a decent wage is the best way to feel secure in life. A Fair Chance leads to most people choosing a good job versus a social program. Boy, makes the Dog feel warm and good inside yet says nothing about what specific plans he has for jobs and how he will vote as a state Senator.

Here's an easy way to solve all of this. The Watchdog challenges both Meunier and Benson to answer the following 5 questions, "yes" or "no" answers only:

1. Will you vote in favor of legislation that requires voters to show a valid photo ID before being allowed to vote?
2. "Bonding bills" are paid for with debt. Will you vote against any bonding bill in the 2011 and 2012 legislative session?
3. In Minnesota, taxpayers are forced to fund abortions. Will you vote in favor of legislation that eliminates taxpayer -funded abortions?
4. Will you vote against legislation to raise income or sales taxes in the 2011-2012 legislative sessions?
5. Will you vote in favor of legislation that ties teacher pay to performance?
We'll post the answers on our web site.

A MAN IS KNOWN BY THE COMPANY HE KEEPS

Despite the lack of specifics regarding policies, we can gain a window into Meunier's world view by examining his special interest group endorsements. These groups usually only endorse candidates who share their views and pledge to vote in favor of legislation they support.

As with his stand on the issues, there is likewise nothing on Meunier's web site indicating his special interest group endorsements, although he has many.

In a partisan race like those for state Senate, many voters want to know the party affiliation of the candidate. Being the endorsed GOP or DFL candidate means

something to voters because it is a clear indication of the candidate's general world view regarding the role of government in our lives.

So why is it that Meunier's status as an endorsed DFL candidate is nowhere to be found?

Could it be because the GOP has done so well in Senate District 49 in recent years?

2008

McCain beats Obama by 11 points

Coleman whooped Franken by 17 points

GOP for Congress beat DFL for Congress by 10 points

2006

Pawlenty beats Hatch by 19 points

GOP for Congress beats DFL for Congress by 15 points

Sen. Debbie Johnson re-elected to state Senate by 5 points without campaigning

2004

Bush beats Kerry by 16 points

GOP for Congress beats DFL for Congress by 16 points

2002

Coleman beats Mondale by 24 points

Pawlenty beats Moe by 25 points

Debbie Johnson re-elected to state Senate by 30 points

Meunier is also endorsed by the usual cavalcade of government employee unions that oppose any common sense fiscal reforms that would help move return the state back to a balanced budget by moving public employee salaries, benefits, and retirement benefits back to something more closely aligned with that found in the private sector. If Meunier is elected, he'll likely fall in line with the government employee unions and toe their line by opposing needed reforms.

Meunier government employee union and other Big Labor endorsements:

MAPE

AFSCME

Teamsters

AFL-CIO

Even worse, Meunier has the endorsement of Education Minnesota, the biggest, fattest union cat on the block. Talk about protecting the status quo. At a time when other states are racing ahead of Minnesota with respect to education reform, Education Minnesota is like a fiscal and policy millstone about the neck of our kids.

The endorsement of this crew screams, "I support the status quo for education!"

PROGRESSIVE MAJORITY

It's also worth noting that Meunier is working with a liberal interest group based in Washington, DC. In fact, the group's web site brags that one its members is managing the Meunier for Senate campaign.

Progressive majority, a "K" street special interest group in Washington, says the following about Meunier:

Paul Meunier is the candidate for Senate District 49. Paul is currently the Mayor of Ham Lake, MN. Paul is deeply connected to his community and is a strong voice on state issues. His opponent, Senator Debbie Johnson, is a staunch conservative. Progressive Majority fielded two candidates for state House in 2008 in this district, winning one of those races. Paul has an outstanding campaign. He has an active volunteer base and his campaign is being managed by a Progressive Majority farm team member.

Progressive Majority staff recruited Paul in 2008 through local DFL partners. Victory in this race will be important to ensure that the DFL maintains its veto-proof majority, and will be an important inroad in a very tough county.

Again, we can find nothing from Meunier disclosing his affiliation with this liberal special interest group operating out of The Swamp.

As noted earlier, there is a tie-in here with current District 49B state Representative Jerry Newton. Newton himself was allied with Progressive Majority for his 2008 campaign. If Newton's dismal, out-of-step voting record is indicative of what Progressive Majority candidates will do when elected, watch out!

So there you have it, Watchdogs. That's what we've uncovered so far regarding the Paul Meunier campaign. The facts show that he is strongly allied with a number of liberal and progressive special interest groups. His endorsements, combined with a lack of policy specifics, should cause voters in Senate District 49 to ask some pointed questions when Meunier shows up at the door regarding who he is and what he believes, and how he will vote if elected.

E-mail Update 8/2/10

In This Issue:

1. Check out the Commissioner Candidates.
2. Benson Responds, Meunier Doesn't.
3. Scott's Wife Can't Fool the Voters.

CHECK OUT THE COMMISSIONER CANDIDATES

Believe it or not, August is upon us and Minnesota's first-ever August primary election is upon us. In just over a week, voters will be going to the polls to narrow a number of contests down to two candidates for the ultimate showdown in November.

Many of the Anoka County commissioner races feature primaries as there are more than two candidates vying to take a seat on the board.

These commissioner races are critical because county government is fairly invisible to most people yet county government, especially in Anoka County, bears careful scrutiny because of the power the commissioners have to tax and spend.

This is especially true in Anoka County because the board has adopted a culture of arrogant, self-serving governance that taxes too much and spends too much in mega-projects that have nothing to do with the core mission of county government while the commissioners live in high style at tax payer expense, dining at fine eateries, travelling like celebrities, and hiring buddies to "lobby" or "consult" at every turn.

Moreover, many of the Good Ol' Boy and liberal candidates work hard to hide their true identities, telling us that this is a "nonpartisan" office and they don't adhere to any particular political ideology, which is a bunch of hogwash.

And while the mainstream media is a willing accomplice in this charade, offering puff piece questionnaires that don't ask the hard questions, the Watchdog is here to give Anoka County voters the only meaningful information they're likely to get regarding these candidates.

Our county commissioner candidates questionnaires are now posted on our web site for the public to read. Find out where the candidates stand on issues like lobbyist contracts, the tourist train to Duluth, and their special interest group endorsements.

We're dedicated to shining the light of truth on these local candidates, depriving the cowards among them from telling you what they believe and where they stand on important issues.

Of course, the cowards will refuse to participate in our meaningful, substantive process. Watchdogs will draw their own conclusions regarding what it means when a candidate refuses to participate in an exercise designed to give voters information.

Find out where they stand (or don't) right here:

DISTRICT 1

Terry Hendriksen: YES

Matt Look: YES

Natalie Steffen: NO

Andy Hillebrgt: NO

DISTRICT 2

Jolynn Erickson: YES

Gary Kirkeide: YES

Debbie Johnson: YES

Andy Westerberg: YES

Erik Evenson: YES

DISTRICT 3

Robyn West: Yes

Mike Bourke: NO

DISTRICT 4

Gregory Sloat: YES

Jim Kordiak: NO

DISTRICT 5

Julie Trude: YES

Michael Rohricht: YES

Becky Fink: NO

Danny Nelson: NO

Scott's Wife: NO

Get informed, Watchdogs!

BENSON RESPONDS, MEUNIER DOESN'T

Last week, we exposed state Senate candidate Paul Meunier, a classic example of a politician attempting to mask where he stands on the issues and who supports his candidacy.

The Watchdog challenged both Meunier and his opponent, Michelle Benson, to tell our readers where they stand on 5 issues important to Anoka County voters.

Benson had the courtesy and the fortitude to respond. No surprise that Meunier didn't respond; he's likely loathe to tell voters where he is on issues like photo ID to vote.

Here are Benson's answers:

Watchdog Responses from Michelle Benson for State Senate:

1. Will you vote in favor of legislation that requires voters to show a valid photo ID before being allowed to vote? Yes
2. "Bonding bills" are paid for with debt. Will you vote against any bonding bill in the 2011 and 2012 legislative session? Yes, with exceptions:

Generally, bonding bills have been filled with pork. This practice of loading up necessary projects with political favors has got to stop. However, there may be times that expensive, long-term projects need to be funded by debt. I would measure the value of the bond against the following criteria.
 - A. The project is a core function of government
 - B. The project cannot be funded by a lower level of government
 - C. The project has a life span exceeding the term of the bond
 - D. The project benefits a plurality of Minnesotans
3. In Minnesota, taxpayers are forced to fund abortions. Will you vote in favor of legislation that eliminates taxpayer-funded abortions? Yes
4. Will you vote against legislation to raise income or sales taxes in the 2011-2012 legislative sessions? Yes
5. Will you vote in favor of legislation that ties teacher pay to performance? Yes

SCOTT'S WIFE CAN'T FOOL THE VOTERS

The mainstream media finally picked up on the story of Scott's wife using his old campaign signs as her own and creating confusion amongst voters in the district, many of whom believe it is Scott who is running and not his wife.

The article's primary virtue was demonstrating beyond a doubt the arrogance of Scott's wife and the little regard she apparently has for the taxpayers she wants to represent on the county board.

First, LeDoux admitted that her signs did not carry the proper disclaimer for her campaign. State law clearly states in part:

A person who participates in the preparation or dissemination of campaign material... that does not prominently include the name and address of the person or committee

causing the material to be prepared or disseminated in a disclaimer substantially in the form provided in paragraph (b) or (c) is guilty of a misdemeanor.

Hamline professor David Schultz accurately described why it's illegal not to display a disclaimer on campaign literature. Said Schultz, " The whole intent of that law is to give voters information regarding who is putting up these signs and what candidate it is and what political committee it is."

Thus, it appears that the lack of an accurate disclaimer is part and parcel of the primary complaint many have regarding Scott's Wife's campaign. Namely, that it confuses voters by blurring the distinctions between Scott's campaign and Scott's Wife's campaign.

Moreover, if Carol LeDoux can't follow the law, why should she get to make laws? Why does she think she doesn't have to post an accurate disclaimer like the other candidates? A bit of arrogance?

Even worse, LeDoux tried to claim that her campaign doesn't have to count the transfer of the lawn signs as an in-kind contribution from Scott's campaign because "signs on the way to the landfill have no value."

Not quite. The lawn signs have definite economic value within a political context because they relieve Scott's Wife from having to purchase signs of her own. Every sign she gets from Scott's campaign is a sign she doesn't have to buy, saving her campaign precious money.

Again, Professor Schultz disagrees, " That wouldn't be accurate if they're actually able to use them and save money by not having to get more signs."

In addition, the signs have intrinsic value because they don't go to a landfill. These signs are made of corrugated plastic and are recycled. There is a multi-billion secondary market for recycled petroleum byproducts like plastic lawn signs. The same holds true for the iron rebar sign posts. Anyone could take these signs and the rebar to a recycle/scrap dealer and get money.

Frankly, the argument is asinine. Does an old car have no value when sent to the scrap yard? How about an old washer/dryer combo? Just because something is being kicked to the curb doesn't mean it lacks monetary value.

Finally, countless other campaign treasurers on both sides of the political aisle would disagree. Any check of campaign finance reports shows that many, many campaigns list the donation of signs and rebar to other campaigns as an in-kind contribution with monetary value.

The Watchdog will be checking county commissioner campaign finance reports this week and we'll be sure to see whether Scott's Wife listed the donated signs and rebar as in-kind contribution.

No value? Puhleeze...

E-mail Update 8/9/10

In This Issue:

1. It's Primary Election Day!
2. An Example of Government Waste.

IT'S PRIMARY ELECTION DAY!

Tomorrow is primary election day, the election where many races with more than two candidates see only the top two vote getters move onto the general election in November. Or, in the case of partisan contests, only one person captures the partisan endorsement and moves on to face the endorsed candidate from other parties in the general election (e.g. the governor's race).

While most people think of the DFL primary contest for governor, there are a number of important primary races happening at the local level right here in Anoka County. Remember that the first duty of a watchdog is to vote for the candidate of your choice on election day. It's a sin not to exercise your constitutional right to participate in the electoral process. It's a right that millions of Americans have fought to protect since the founding of the greatest nation the world has ever known.

Moreover, the nation is sadly at risk of financial collapse, thanks to feckless politicians at all levels who have spent us into oblivion, leveraging us like a banana republic in the name of buying off multiple special interest constituencies who demand unsustainable governmental payoffs we can't possibly hope to pay back in our lifetime. The legacy of the current crop of entrenched politicians like Good Ol' Boy Godfather Dan Erhart is a massive Chinese IOU that will be given to our children and grandchildren, jeopardizing their opportunity to achieve the American dream.

Voters are rightly concerned, even angry, about the current state of affairs. Many incumbent politicians will be given their pink slip this year, rightly told by their constituents that it's time for new, principled leadership that is unafraid to say "no!" to the countless special interest groups suckling at the teet of a government sow run dry.

It's about time to re-introduce people to the concepts of personal responsibility, rugged individualism, and personal liberty. It's time to elect men and women who believe in constitutional government, who believe that government has enumerated powers and is limited in power. The time has arrived to elect citizens who recognize that liberty is inherent in people and not government. That government only has those powers that are loaned to it by the consent of the governed and that that power may be recalled at the ballot box at the next election.

But none of this will happen unless you, the citizen, take your own measure of personal responsibility by casting an informed vote at the polls, starting tomorrow. It will only happen if you get involved in the political process by sharing your time and resources

with candidates dedicated to governing for the common good and not for personal gain and power.

If you haven't gotten your duff off the couch yet, it all starts tomorrow.

This edition of the Watchdog is your primer for tomorrow's election. It's your country, watchdogs, take it back!

WHERE TO VOTE

Finding your polling place is easy. Simply visit the Secretary of State's precinct finder to find out where to vote. The precinct finder also provides maps to the polling location, a sample ballot, and a list of candidates running in your area. This list will show you which races in your area have a primary.

The Secretary of State's election web site also has useful information regarding other election issues like voting registration.

THE RACES

While some federal and state-wide offices have a primary, this update is focused on local races, particularly the primary elections for the Anoka County Board. For years, the county board has been dominated by the Good Ol' Boys club, which has abused the taxpayers to pay for expensive junkets and government-issued credit cards that have paid for everything from expensive power dinners at 5-star restaurants to tooth brushes and newspapers. Moreover, the board has frequently engaged in quixotic chases for mega projects like a Vikings stadium while ignoring core priorities like road maintenance and construction.

BE SURE TO CHECK OUT OUR COUNTY COMMISSIONER CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRES RIGHT HERE!

Be sure to check out what the candidates had to say in response to our pointed questionnaire.

These are the candidates for county board in a primary race who weren't afraid to respond:

Anoka County District 1
Terry Hendriksen
Matt Look

Anoka County District 2
Joey Erickson

Debbie Johnson
Gary Kirkeide
Erik Evenson
Andy Westerberg

Anoka County District 5
Julie Trude
Michael Rohricht

VOTE ON AUGUST 10!

PRIMARY CITY RACES IN ANOKA COUNTY

Blaine District 3
Katherine Kolb
Michael Von Wald
Jason Walton

Columbia Heights City Council (2 seats)
Tammi Diehm
Steve Hofer
Stan Hoium
Bruce Kelzenberg
Donna Schmitt (See web site)

Coon Rapids Mayor
Tim Howe
Dave Nelson
Philip Rosar

Coon Rapids District 5
Cedric Lattimore
Bruce Sanders
Alan Williams

Ramsey City Council
Randy Backous
Terri Cleveland
Gary Greb
Dustin Reeder
Bob Sibilski

You may be able to find information on these candidates by clicking [here](#).

AN EXAMPLE OF GOVERNMENT WASTE

To further inspire you to get to the polls, watchdogs, comes a prime example of local government throwing money down a rat hole.

Since March 2009, the City of East Bethel has paid Good Ol' Boy Elwyn Tinklenberg to lobby Washington for road and trail money.

The result? The city has yet to obtain a single dime in federal funding through Tink's efforts. In other words, Tinklenberg has delivered absolutely nothing in the 17 months he's been sucking money out of the city treasury.

East Bethel residents ought to be asking their city council why they need to be paying a lobbyist, especially one that apparently can't deliver the ear marks the city seeks. Taxpayers ought to demand Tinklenberg be fired and the money redirected to filling pot holes or some other core function of city government.

If the city has the bucks to hire Tinklenberg, then surely there is enough money in city coffers to avoid a property tax increase.

On a hopeful note, it was reported that Congresswoman Michele Bachmann refuses to request ear marks for any of these requested projects. Wonderful! The congressional ear mark process is abusive and emblematic of what's wrong with Washington. Kudos to Bachmann.

E-mail Update 8/16/10

In This Issue:

POST-PRIMARY SPECIAL EDITION!

Last week's primary election has narrowed the field to two candidates in three county commissioner races, while there were two races that did not have a primary. With three open seats, this is undoubtedly the most important county commissioner race in a generation.

Outright control of the board for the next generation is on the line and in every race save one, there is a clear choice between a Good Ol' Boy candidate and a true reform-minded candidate.

Voters in two of the county commissioner primary races sent both a Good Ol' Boy and a reformer to the general election, putting control of the county board up for grabs.

This election could bring the board back under the control of the Good Ol' Boys and return Dan Erhart to supremacy. Or the race could decisively turn control over to Reformers and a New Guard that will end the taxpayer abuse once and for all.

For years, Watchdogs have dreamt of a county board truly devoted to the common good and focused solely on the core functions of county government. Watchdogs share a vision of a county board free from junkets, taxpayer credit cards, fat lobbyist contracts, the pursuit of expensive mega-projects, and the kind of log rolling and cronyism usually found in rural counties in Alabama and Louisiana.

Watchdogs, that kind of future is in reach. It's possible, with hard work, to wrest control away from the Good Ol' Boys and deliver it to candidates who know and live the term "public servant."

On the other hand, we are on the cusp of many more years of "business as usual" politics in Anoka County. This election could easily be won by the Good Ol' Boys who will return Dan Erhart to Chairman for another Reign of Terror on the taxpayers.

This week, we'll break down the county commissioner races for November in Districts 1 and 2, including a look at the campaign finances of the candidates to give you the kind analysis you need to make an informed choice in November. Of course, the Watchdog is the only place where you'll find this kind of news and analysis for Anoka County races.

Next week, we look at districts 3,4, and 5, including taking a close look at what Scott's Wife has been up to in her race.

DISTRICT 1: MATT LOOK VS. NATALIE STEFFEN

This race is a classic match-up between the Good Ol' Boys and the Reformers. The district is an open seat to replace Good Ol' Boy Dennis Berg and is thus a pick-up opportunity for the Reformers. In fact, the Reformers have to win this seat to win control of the county board.

Matt Look is the Reformer in the race and came in second on primary night, garnering 1,641 votes. Another Reformer, Terry Hendriksen, came in third with 668 votes. It will be interesting to see if Hendriksen will endorse Look and close ranks against the Good Ol' Boys.

According to his Watchdog questionnaire, Look is a small business owner and member of the Ramsey City Council who has fought against Big Government encroachment, such as when the Met Council tried to control private property in the city. Look opposes the tourist train to Duluth and promises to cut spending.

On the other side of the ledger, Look will have to convince Watchdogs that his support of Northstar rail isn't evidence of a tendency to support other mega projects.

On his campaign finance report, Look received \$4,825 in contributions, \$3,500 of that amount coming in the form of a loan from himself. There were no reported contributions from lobbyists or other special interests in Look's report.

Look has reported spending \$3,604 thus far.

Look will be facing off against Natalie Haas Steffen, who was the top vote getter in District 1 on primary night.

Natalie Haas Steffen is a Hall of Fame member of the Good Ol' Boys Club, dating back to her stints on the Ramsey City Council and previous tenure on the Anoka County Board.

She currently sits on the MET COUNCIL, an un-elected, unaccountable branch of regional government that seems to have as its core mission the task of running roughshod over locally elected, locally accountable city councils.

With all due respect, the Watchdog wonders why so many voters in this district were asleep at the switch on election night. The Met Council has abused the City of Ramsey and Anoka County like a rented mule over the years. The vast majority of the good people of this city moved out there to be free of governmental policies like "Livable Communities" that seek to spread the poverty and crime that Ramsey thankfully doesn't know.

How a sitting member of the MET COUNCIL won the most votes in a primary in this area of Anoka County is a real head scratcher.

If you want some proof of Steffen's ties to the Good Ol' Boys, one only need take a gander at her campaign finance report. Steffen raised \$11,110 and spent \$7,265, according to her report.

More importantly, Steffen's report details all the lobbyist and special interest contributions and HER ATTEMPT TO HIDE the true identity of these contributors.

Take the contribution from Jeff Davidman. Davidman is listed as a "businessman." Uh, Davidman is a REGISTERED LOBBYIST, which would be a better description for what he does for a living.

And guess what? One of Davidman's accounts is ANOKA COUNTY.

The same story is true for one David Johnson, another contributor listed as a "business man." Again, he's a registered lobbyist who has ANOKA COUNTY as a client.

Wait, we're not done with this scummy tale just yet. Steffen also received a contribution from a law firm PAC, the Best and Flanagan Political Fund.

And guess who the Best and Flanagan law firm has on their staff? Yep. "Businessmen" David Johnson and Jeff Davidman.

You see how this works. Davidman, Johnson, and their law firm give donations to Good Ol' Boy candidates like Natalie Steffen. Steffen then gets on the board and votes to give them lobbying contracts. This mutual back scratching at taxpayer expense is the essence of the Good Ol' Boy Pirate ethos and a window into how this filthy political ecosystem sustains itself.

According to the State Auditor's most recent report, Anoka County spent over \$188,000 on lobbyists in 2009.

According to that same report, the Best and Flanagan law firm took in over \$156,000 in fees from local units of government that year.

Here's the dirty tie between the two: Best and Flanagan received \$69,000 in contracts from Anoka County and \$15,000 from the Anoka County Regional Rail Authority in 2009.

If elected, will Steffen recuse herself from votes to award lobbying contracts to this law firm? Hell no.

And don't think this firm is the only one in bed with Steffen. Lobbyists Lloyd Grooms and Trudy Richter are also warming the pillows.

DISTRICT 2: DEBBIE JOHNSON VS. ANDY WESTERBERG

This is another race that provides voters a clear choice between a Good Ol' Boy and a Reformer and, like District 1, is an open seat because of the retirement of incumbent Dick Lang.

Current state Senator Debbie Johnson made it through the primary by squeaking past Joey Erikson by a scant 68 vote margin to take second place. Johnson placed a distant second, as front runner Andy Westerberg took in over 1,500 votes.

In this race, Johnson is the clear Reformer candidate. First, Johnson has an established record of fiscal conservatism in the Minnesota Senate, where she scored a respectable 81% lifetime rating, including a 91% score in 2010 from the Taxpayer's League of Minnesota.

Johnson also spoke like a true Watchdog in her candidate questionnaire, where she vowed to fire the lobbyists, vote against commuter rail projects, and reduce what she called a "bloated" county budget.

Johnson raised an anemic \$1,985 in her report while spending a reported \$15.65. The only question Johnson will have to answer is her taking of PAC money from the Best and Flanagan firm (see above).

Having said that, Johnson has a record of fiscal conservatism that supports the tough talk in her questionnaire. We especially like her statement that she will be opposing all commuter rail projects.

Contrary to what he may tell Republican voters in district 2, Andy Westerberg is aligned with the Good Ol' Boys through and through.

Unlike Johnson, Westerberg supports extending the expensive Northstar commuter rail line to Saint Cloud.

Moreover, there is a strong contrast between the two on the Vikings stadium issue. Johnson voted AGAINST the stadium (Senate Journal 5332).

Westerberg was FOR the Vikings stadium, and was CHIEF AUTHOR of the stadium bill.

With the Vikings still looking for a new home, we need commissioners who will oppose a stadium. That fight is not yet over!

When it comes to lobbyists, Johnson wants to fire them while Westerberg offered a less than assuring "answer" that told us nothing except he will take a close look at the problem.

One reason Westerberg may not want to fire those lobbyists is that they and their PACs are behind him in a big way. And so are the Good Ol' Boys.

Lobbyists who have given to Westerberg: Trudy Richter.

PACs: Faegre and Benson, Lindquist and Venum

Good Ol' Boys: Hollis Cavner, Ted Capra, Larry Carlson, Russ Herbst.

Overall, Westerberg raised \$5,670 so far and spent about \$2,500, according to his report.

Most importantly, Westerberg ought to explain his donation from Vance Opperman, a DFL donor bigwig, who was the top individual donor to the DFL in the 2008 election cycle.

Westerberg ought to explain why a former GOP legislator WHO HAS THE GOP ENDORSEMENT for county commissioner took money from a DFL fat cat.

Watchdogs in Ham Lake also report that DFL state Senate candidate Paul Meunier has a Westerberg lawn sign up in his yard.

Finally, Westerberg has a paltry 70% lifetime rating from the Taxpayer's League, including a crappy 33% rating in 2006, his last year in the Minnesota House.

Just like in District 1, the Reformers need this seat if they are to control the board.
Next week: Districts 3,4,and 5.

E-mail Update 8/23/10

In This Issue:

1. You Didn't Know?
2. County Commissioner Race Update.

YOU DIDN'T KNOW?

Last week's update on county commissioner races produced an incredible amount of feedback. In particular, many readers were stunned that District 2 commissioner candidate Andy Westerberg was so cozy with the Good Ol' Boys and the Democrats.

After reading our update last week, conservatives in the area were outraged that the guy with the GOP endorsement in this race took money from a DFL fat cat (Vance Opperman). They also apparently forgot about Westerberg's authorship of a Vikings stadium in Anoka County and his support of commuter rail.

There is now an odd dynamic and a dilemma for many conservatives as Westerberg managed to finagle the GOP endorsement while his opponent, Debbie Johnson, doesn't have it. Yet Johnson is a sitting GOP state Senator and clearly the conservative candidate in the race.

Don't underestimate the feeling of betrayal for many conservatives who voted for Westerberg on Primary Day. Debbie Johnson has a ripe opportunity to strip them away and earn the unified endorsement of prominent local Republicans, whatever conflicts may have existed in the past.

In fact, there is a lot of buzz that some delegates will move to have Westerberg's endorsement re-considered and have both Westerberg and Johnson compete for it.

Could Andy Westerberg be the GOP version of Satveer Chaudhary? Could the rare case of endorsement removal happen twice in one cycle? In the same county, no less?

COUNTY COMMISSIONER RACE UPDATE

Last week, we reviewed the races in districts 1 and 2. This week, we visit districts 3,4, and 5.

DISTRICT 3

This district is centered on Blaine and did not have a primary contest as only two candidates filed, which is fairly typical when the seat features an incumbent running for re-election.

The incumbent is Robyn West, a fiscal conservative and frequent ally of Commissioner Rhonda Sivarajah, the other fiscal conservative on the board.

West is running her first re-election campaign, having been first elected in 2006.

West reported raising a respectable \$7,038 during the pre-primary period.

(Editor's note: campaign finance reports for this race will be posted soon.)

West's opponent is a Good Ol' Boy recruit and Blaine City Councilman Mike Bourke. Bourke reported raising \$5,670, which included a donation from - you guessed it - Vance Opperman, who for some reason has been ubiquitous in Good Ol' Boy finance reports.

This race is a classic match-up between the Reformers and the Good Ol' Boys. West has been a consistent Watchdog on the Board and thus has a target on her back from the Boys.

West works hard, has done right by her district, and should be re-elected.

DISTRICT 4

This district is centered on the southern end of the county, in the cities of Columbia Heights and Fridley.

The area has been represented for many decades by the Kordiak family, with Jim Kordiak the current seat holder.

While Kordiak isn't a member of the Good Ol' Boys, he is certainly a co-conspirator, frequently enabling Dan Erhart and certainly doing nothing to stop the taxpayer abuse.

Kordiak, not surprisingly, failed to submit a candidate questionnaire.

Kordiak raised \$6,215 during the reporting period, with none of the contributions itemized (only contributions in excess of \$100 need to be itemized).

Kordiak's opponent is Greg Sloat, who is a true Watchdog given his responses to the candidate questionnaire.

Sloat, however, did not file a campaign finance report, which likely means he has raised no money so far.

It's going to be very hard to defeat a dynastic incumbent like Kordiak without raising substantial funds.

If Sloat pulls off the upset, Anoka County will be in strong fiscal shape for years to come.

But even if Kordiak keeps his seat, a change in Board power to the Reformers may draw Kordiak to their side. He has never shown any particular passion or core

principles while on the Board, instead driven more by events and the personalities of others. Like the Vichy French, Kordiak could well be flying a different flag come January if things work out.

DISTRICT 5

Unlike Districts 3 and 4, this district, centered on Coon Rapids, featured a primary. This race is an open seat to succeed Scott LeDoux, who resigned early in the summer.

The race had five candidates, which were narrowed to two after the Primary.

Unfortunately, the two who advanced to the general election are bound to be disappointments to Watchdogs but for different reasons.

Becky Fink advanced to the general election by placing second. Fink is making her second run for this seat and is an unapologetic liberal who believes in the power of government to solve our problems.

Fink failed to submit a questionnaire to the Watchdog but is well known to us for the reasons stated above.

Fink raised a paltry \$1,129 during the reporting period and was a surprising second-place finisher, given her low profile during the primary election cycle.

Fink's redeeming quality, however, is that she is not a member of the Good Ol' Boy club and would very likely prefer to spend tax money on programs to benefit citizens instead of mega projects to benefit the Club and the special interests who fund the Club.

Fink's opponent will be none other than Scott's Wife, whose brilliant strategy to run as nothing more than Scott's Wife paid off handsomely, as she garnered the most votes in District 5 on primary night without ever doing more than telling voters she's Scott's Wife and will "continue the fight," whatever that means. Perhaps the fight to travel to Hawaii and Arizona on the taxpayer dime? The fight to eat at 5-star restaurants with a taxpayer credit card?

Did we mention that she's Scott's Wife?

For example, Watchdogs reported receiving phone calls from her campaign the night before the primary, telling voters that "if you liked what Scott did on the Board, you'll like Scott's Wife because she will follow suit."

Watchdogs are also well aware of her use of her husband's lawn signs, which are identical to his with the exception of the first name being removed.

Also notice that her campaign report lists her husband's lawn signs as a rental and not as an in-kind contribution.

Really? A rental implies that the owner will take back possession of the leased property and retain ownership throughout.

Just why would Scott LeDoux take back these lawn signs years down the road? That's frankly ridiculous and probably unprecedented in recent campaign finance history.

And if the signs are only rented, whose campaign is responsible for them? Whose disclaimer must be listed on the bottom? If Scott LeDoux's campaign is the owner, then his campaign is responsible for the signs, the disclaimer and all other liabilities that attach to ownership. It's bizarre but perhaps very much intentional.

Scott's Wife reported raising \$6,325 during the reporting period. The report itemizes contributions from real estate investors, who usually have an interest in local units of government because they set zoning and land use rules in which developers have an interest.

Scott's wife also posits as her central campaign theme an aversion to partisan politics, as if being partisan is something negative. But then again, partisanship must be underpinned by strong core values and a coherent world view.

How interesting to consider that Scott's Wife took a big contribution from - you guessed it - Vance Opperman, one of Minnesota's biggest partisans.

We guess that the aversion to partisanship is trumped by the desire to rake in campaign cash.

So there you have it, Watchdogs. In District 5, you can choose between a proud liberal and an empty Ann Taylor business suit.

Perhaps a write-in vote is in order?

E-mail Update 8/30/10

In This Issue:

1. Get Ready To Celebrate!
2. Who's a Good Ol' Boy?
3. Invalid Endorsement?
4. What's a Regional Rail Authority?

GET READY TO CELEBRATE!

Watchdogs, mark your calendar for Thursday evening, September 30! The Anoka County Watchdog will be celebrating our 5th anniversary of journalistic excellence in grand fashion.

Yes, it's been a half-decade since Harold Hamilton got fed up with the Good Ol' Boys and politics-as-usual and decided to shine the light of truth on the moldy underbelly of our fair county.

Again, mark those calendars for September 30 at 7PM at Majestic Oaks in Ham Lake, one of our favorite locations.

It promises to be a evening packed with good old fashioned political discussion and conservative fellowship as Watchdogs get fired up to deliver some political street justice in November.

Stay tuned for details in coming weeks!

WHO'S A GOOD OL' BOY?

District 3 Anoka County commissioner candidate Mike Bourke, that's who. Watchdogs in Blaine tell us that Bourke recently held a fundraiser attended by none other than Good Ol' Boy Godfather himself, Dan Erhart.

There is definitely a clear choice in District 3 this year. Bourke clearly represents the Good Ol' Boys and will certainly be an acolyte for Dan Erhart on the board.

Robyn West, on the other hand, has a proven record of fiscal conservatism and standing up for taxpayers and against the status quo.

The choice is that simple and it's totally up to you.

INVALID ENDORSEMENT?

The fallout continues in District 2 regarding Andy Westerberg after the Watchdog broke the story regarding Westerberg's seeming inconsistency between his status as the

endorsed Republican candidate in the race and some of his votes as a legislator as well as the support he receives from DFL and liberal interests.

The Watchdog has heard from a large number of Republican delegates in the area who are feeling a bit angry and embarrassed that they turned their endorsement over to a man who voted for Northstar rail and authored a bill to build a Vikings stadium in the county.

The Watchdog has learned from a source close to the Minnesota Republican Party that the Party is reviewing the June endorsement of Westerberg because of alleged irregularities that may render the endorsement invalid.

The Watchdog wasn't present at the June endorsement in District 2 but is told that the convention endorsed both Jolynn Erickson and Andy Westerberg at the convention. Apparently, the convention also agreed to "come back" after the primary for reasons that aren't altogether clear.

The source goes on to note that the complaints to the state Party center on these two facts. It is alleged that neither candidate received the required 60% for endorsement and that it is not permissible to simultaneously endorse two candidates for the same seat.

There is apparently confusion regarding just what the delegates agreed to when they agreed to "come back" after the primary. Did they agree to come back and re-confirm the endorsement of one or both of the June endorsees? Did they mean to come back and re-open the endorsement to all nominees?

The Watchdog isn't affiliated with either local Republican units or the Republican Party of Minnesota, so we won't attempt to pass judgment with respect to the validity of Westerberg's endorsement.

The point is that there continues to be a great deal of controversy surrounding Westerberg's candidacy and the possible re-emergence of Debbie Johnson as a local GOP favorite.

Remember that Johnson is the current GOP state Senator for the district who lost endorsement for re-election to newcomer Michelle Benson.

Johnson then decided to run for county commissioner but declined to seek the GOP endorsement for the seat in June, when Westerberg and Erickson received the unusual simultaneous endorsement.

Another interesting twist to the saga in the involvement of state Representative Tom Hackbarth, who is actively supporting Johnson. Hackbarth is a veteran GOP legislator who is well respected in the area, having represented almost all of District 2 at one point

or another during a legislative career that began in 1994 Hackbarth will no doubt be an influential voice on this issue.

So, will Johnson directly challenge Westerberg's endorsement? Will she seek it herself after passing the first time around?

Will local GOP stalwarts like Sen. Mike Jungbauer, Rep. Peggy Scott, and Rep. Tim Sanders weigh in and pick sides?

Stay tuned. This one could be a donnybrook.

WHAT'S A REGIONAL RAIL AUTHORITY?

How many Watchdogs out there know what a "regional rail authority" is or who sits on Anoka County's rail authority?

We thought so. That's in large part because the County, in the image of Dan Erhart, doesn't want you to know too much about this body that promotes commuter rail in the county AND HAS THE POWER TO TAX YOUR PROPERTY!

Chaired by Good Ol' Boy Godfather Dan Erhart, the county board sits at the Anoka County Regional Rail Authority (ACRRA) and essentially passes your tax money through to other quasi-governmental entities like the Northstar Corridor Development Authority (NCDA) and the Northern Lights Passenger Rail Alliance (NLX) in what many taxpayer advocates feel is a shell game that diminishes accountability and transparency. Again, how many of you knew the county had a regional rail authority and who ran it?

As mentioned, the ACRRA has the power to tax your property to pay for rail projects that impact the county, like Northstar commuter rail and the proposed tourist train to Duluth.

This past week, Commissioner Rhonda Sivarajah, the Iron Lady of Anoka County, blew the rail authority's cover by exposing a 45-47% PROPERTY TAX LEVY INCREASE for commuter rail projects, including another station for Northstar rail and the aforementioned Duluth tourist train.

Of course, this massive proposed tax increase received little exposure in the mainstream media, leaving it to the Watchdog, yet again, to sound the alarm.

Even by the Good Ol' Boy standards, the size of this proposed tax increase is astonishing. This country is in the midst of a recession and few taxpayers can afford an increase in the property taxes. Moreover, you would have to be living under a rock not to know that the persistent weakness in the economy is led by the massive downturn in the housing market.

It's a bad idea to raise taxes in a recession. It's a rotten idea to raise real estate taxes when the housing market has all but collapsed in the recession.

Has the value of your home gone up by 45% this year? How about those of you who own a business and the land and building that houses your business? Have you seen a 45% increase in profits? A 45% increase in revenues? A 45% increase in hiring?

This proposed tax increase is yet one more piece of evidence that the Good Ol' Boys don't give a rip about the average taxpayer and are out of touch. Commissioners Erhart, Lang, Kordiak, and Berg all voted for this tax increase. Lang and Berg aren't running for re-election. Kordiak is up for re-election, and Erhart isn't up this year.

Bear in mind that this is the PROPOSED increase. The ACRRA will certify the 2011 levy at a meeting in December. Contact your county commissioner today and let them know that you urge them not to raise the levy, given the state of the economy. But if you're represented by anyone other than Sivarajah or West, don't hold your breath for a positive response.

Having said that, every Watchdog should send a note of thanks to Commissioner Sivarajah. County taxpayers have never had a better friend looking out for them.

E-mail Update 9/7/10

In This Issue:

1. Anoka County is at it Again.
2. MetroNorth Chamber is a Shill.
3. Westerberg's Scores Another Endorsement.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Remember to mark your calendar for the Watchdog's 5th anniversary party! It will be a night of conservative fellowship as we get energized for a monumental election!

September 30

7PM

Majestic Oaks in Ham Lake

Stay tuned for details!

ANOKA COUNTY IS AT IT AGAIN

For years, the Watchdog has reported on Anoka County's significant lobbying expenses as reported to the State Auditor. But these expenses only reflected what was spent to lobby state officials.

Now, our friends at the Freedom Foundation of Minnesota have uncovered the other side of this slimy coin and published a research piece exposing how much local units of government (LGUs) are spending to lobby the federal government for a piece of the Chinese-financed pie.

Since 2006, LGUs have spent over \$5 million of your hard tax dollars to lobby Washington for more tax dollars. More troubling, 2010 is on track to be a record year. Yes, just when government officials are telling you how broke they are and how budgets have been cut to the bone, they're out there spending record amounts on lobbyists and lobbying activities.

Anoka County, of course, has always been a lead pig at the lobbying trough when it comes to state lobbying. Thus, it should come as no surprise that they are also a lead swine at the federal trough.

Anoka County or organizations that lobby on its behalf occupy 3 of the top 10 slots when it comes to spending the most to lobby the federal government from 2006 - 2010.

ANOKA COUNTY REGIONAL RAIL AUTHORITY (ACRRA)

Ironically, the Watchdog reported just last week on this body's decision to radically jack up your property taxes and now we know why. There are many hungry lobbyist mouths to feed during these difficult economic times.

For those who may have missed last week's outstanding update because of open heart surgery or a bout with ebola, we explained that the ACRRA is a county government panel that has taxing authority to promote the county's rail interests, such as they may be. The county commissioners sit as the rail authority, so it's one more opportunity for Good Ol' Boys like Dan Erhart and Dennis Berg to raise your taxes, hand out some lobbying contracts to cronies, and eat at nice restaurants at your expense.

And lobby they have! Since 2006, the ACCRA has spent nearly \$370,000 lobbying the federal government.

While the Freedom Foundation Report doesn't break down and itemize expense, a look at the ACRRA's itemized state lobbying expenses shows that at least two lobbying firms, Messerli and Kramer, and Best and Flanagan, received lobbying contracts.

Just think of how many pot holes could have been filled for \$370,000.

NORTHSTAR CORRIDOR DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY (NCDA)

Anyone noticing a railroad theme this? How ironic that the Good Ol' Boys are using the railroad to railroad taxpayers.

The NCDA is a joint powers governmental body that oversees the infamous Northstar commuter rail line, which transports few commuters and seems to exist primarily to get folks down to Target Field to see the Twins.

The NCDA continues to aggressively push to force more Northstar rail on the taxpayers by continuing a drive to extend the line to Saint Cloud even though the federal government said such an extension offered a negative cost-benefit return. Yes, this extension failed even the federal government's weak cost-benefit metrics.

The NCDA gets money by charging participating LGUs membership dues. In turn, the LGUs get the dues money through your property taxes.

And the chairman of this group? None other than the Godfather himself, Dan Erhart. Yes, Watchdogs, this yet another opportunity for the Boys to spend some of your money.

Since 2006, Dan Erhart and NCDA cronies have spent \$363,000 lobbying Washington on behalf of the Killer Train. What's worse, it's difficult to track these expenses at the

state level because the NCDA doesn't report to the State Auditor like the ACCRA and the county itself must report.

ANOKA COUNTY

We're not done, folks. Coming in at number 8 is the mothership herself, Anoka County. The county since 2006 has spent \$280,000 lobbying Washington for some of those monopoly bucks being printed in the Capitol basement.

You wonder why the county needs to pay anyone to lobby in Washington when expense reports reveal that commissioners like Dan Erhart have taken multiple junkets to Washington during this reporting period. If taxpayers are paying lobbyists, why are commissioners junketing to DC?

Conversely, if commissioners are traveling to DC, why are we paying lobbyists?

Elections matter, Watchdogs.

All told, these expenses total just over a cool million.

Besides the money spent on lobbyists, there is another serious problem exposed by this scheme.

These multiple taxing authorities, joint powers entities, and multiple governing boards confuse the public and greatly reduce transparency and accountability.

For example, taxpayers in Anoka County see money spent on rail alone by the regional rail authority, the NCDA, and the county itself. In the case of Northstar rail, that's three entities spending the same tax dollars on the same project.

Can there be any doubt that this model breeds a lack of transparency and accountability? It would be very easy, for example, to divide expenses between the NCDA and the ACCRA to make a contract look less expensive than it really was or to avoid reporting or voting thresholds for contract amounts. Let's hope that has never happened, but we're not naive.

And some politicians can't understand why taxpayers are fed up and angry.

METRO NORTH CHAMBER IS A SHILL

Over the years, the Watchdog has continued to expose the MetroNorth Chamber of Commerce as little more than a shill and a front for the Good Ol' Boys.

Further proof of this sad state of affairs has come to light in two ways this election season, courtesy of the Chamber's political action committee, which endorses candidates and offers campaign contributions.

First, the Watchdog has obtained a candidate questionnaire for candidates in Ham Lake that offers the following loaded question about bringing city sewer and water into the city:

- The Ham Lake business environment remains economically challenged due to the lack of a municipal water and sewer system. If elected, would you propose to improve this business climate as it relates to water and sewer? Please provide one or two specific examples.

Bringing city sewer and water into Ham Lake has been shouted down by the vast majority of taxpayers in Ham Lake because of the potential expense, lack of benefits, and Met Council interference that comes with the project.

But then again, the Good Ol' Boys want the project, so the Chamber shells for it.

If anyone wants to know why this project has gone nowhere in Ham Lake, call Ham Lake city councilman Gary Kirkeide, a Watchdog who has fought this nonsense from the start.

Second, Anoka County commissioner candidate Andy Westerberg had himself a fundraiser last week. As the Dog has noted, Westerberg has many fans in the Good Ol' Boy faction and in the DFL.

Sources who attended the fundraiser noted that Leonard Gandel attended and appeared to play a prominent role in the event. While Gandel isn't a household name, he is the chairman of the Chamber's PAC.

You would think that the chairman of this PAC would do everything to at least keep the appearance of neutrality while the PAC considers endorsements in local races.

If Westerberg captures the Chamber PAC endorsement, it will be further evidence that the Chamber is nothing more than a shell for certain interests and not a voice for free market capitalism in the North Metro area.

ANDY WESTERBERG SCORES ANOTHER ENDORSEMENT

The Watchdog has faithfully reported on the growing bruhaha in Anoka County District 2, where former GOP state representative Andy Westerberg is facing off against current GOP state Senator Debbie Johnson.

The uproar is over Westerberg's support from establishment DFLers and as well as the Good Ol' Boys.

You see, Westerberg also has the Republican endorsement and GOP delegates have rightly wondered why a guy who has pledged to uphold the party platform by virtue of his endorsement is hanging out with folks who oppose Republican principles.

During our weekly research, the Watchdog uncovered yet another DFL endorsement for Westerberg, this one from Roger Johnson.

Now old Roger may not be well known to most readers, but he is quite familiar to us. Johnson is a long-time DFL activist, DFL candidate for legislature, and true partisan warrior. For example, Johnson makes no bones about his respect and admiration for the late Paul Wellstone's policies.

So what did Roger say about the endorsed Republican in District 2?

"I don't live in Andy's district; but if I did I'd vote for him. He'll show up for work and will represent the people of his district. He's far and away the best choice."

So far, it appears to us that Westerberg has more DFL endorsements than Republican.

E-mail Update 9/13/10

In This Issue:

1. Birthday Bash Update.
2. The Iron Lady Debunks the Tourist Train.
3. Beware the Watchdog Imposter!
4. Spring Lake Park Schools have Plenty of Money.
5. Must Watch Video.

BIRTHDAY BASH UPDATE

Anticipation continues to build for the Anoka County Watchdog's 5th anniversary blow out bash. The Dog can now reveal a partial list of candidates and conservative office holders who will be in attendance:

- Dan "Doc" Severson, current state Representative and Secretary of State candidate;
- Rhonda Sivarajah, Anoka County Commissioner and the "Iron Lady" of the county;
- Michelle Benson candidate for state Senate;
- Pam Wolf, candidate for state Senate;
- Peggy Scott, state Representative;
- Branden Petersen, candidate for state Representative;
- Robyn West, Anoka County Commissioner;
- Matt Look, candidate for county commissioner;
- Debbie Johnson, candidate for county commissioner;
- Gary Kirkeide, Ham Lake City Council;
- Mike Van Kirk, candidate for Ham Lake Mayor

Stay tuned for updates regarding public official and candidate attendees.

Watchdog founder and CEO Harold Hamilton has decreed a dress code of Watchdog t-shirts. If you're wearing your t-shirt that night, you'll be eligible for some cool Watchdog swag, free from the Big Dog himself. And unlike Obama, Harold pays for the goodies he hands out!

Thursday, September 30

7PM

Majestic Oaks Golf Course, Ham Lake

Be there!

THE IRON LADY DEBUNKS THE TOURIST TRAIN

The Watchdog has affectionately dubbed Anoka County commissioner Rhonda Sivarajah the "Iron Lady" of Anoka County. Of course, this moniker was originally bestowed on former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, the Iron Lady of England and a trail blazing pioneer in terms of conservative leadership and carving out a place for female leadership on the Cold War international stage.

Rhonda in similar fashion has blazed a trail for conservative women in Anoka County. Candidates and elected leaders like Michelle Benson, Robyn West, Peggy Scott, Pam Wolf, Julie Braastad and Sheri Bukkila can all thank Rhonda for her principled leadership that clearly demonstrated that the ladies in this county can be every bit as tough, principled, and conservative as their male counterparts.

It isn't an understatement to say that Rhonda is the first truly conservative county commissioner in our county in many, many, decades. She put an end to the Good Ol' Boys dynasty on the board and has led a resurgence of accountability and transparency on a board in desperate need of help.

While the media loves to tout the election of Margaret Langfeld to the county board back in the 1980s, Watchdogs know the only history she made was becoming the first woman to join the Good Ol' Boys Club, which perhaps should have then become the Good Ol' Persons Club.

Well, the Iron Lady has come through once again, this time delivering a logical, pinpoint carpet bombing on the Northern Lights Express, AKA the Tourist Train to Duluth.

While the entire article is well worth the read, take a look at what Rhonda says about the costs of this rolling Leviathan that makes Northstar Rail (AKA the Killer Train) look like a great bargain by comparison:

The estimated capital cost of the project has been said to be anywhere from \$550 to \$750 million in 2008 dollars. Proponents state they expect the cost to be around \$615 million, but just less than two years ago they estimated the capital costs to be \$360 million.

This total cost does not include a concrete wall, which the railroad states is necessary for safety reasons, in sections where an additional track would need to be laid in order

to accommodate speeds of 110 mph. One source indicates the cost of this wall could be as high as \$600 million.

It is anticipated that the true capital costs of the entire project could be a staggering \$1 to \$1.2 billion. But wait, that estimate does not include the price tag for the stations. The Foley station in Coon Rapids alone will cost upwards of a whopping \$114 million. The cost of the stations will likely be covered by local property taxes.

But, don't fear the entire \$1 billion price tag will not come from your property taxes. Proponents say that the federal government may come up with up to 80 percent of the capital costs. Personally, I will believe it when I see it. The federal government has yet to live up to its promise to school districts of paying 40 percent of special education costs. Whatever the federal government doesn't pay, will be covered by either local governments or the State of Minnesota, which is facing a \$6 billion deficit. Either way, the taxes to pay for this will come out of your pocket.

The Anoka County commissioners will decide the fate of this white elephant. Ask your county commissioner candidates where they stand on the Northern Lights Express train. If they waffle on any answer other than a strong "NO," they must be on the Good Ol' Boy (person?) ticket.

BEWARE THE WATCHDOG IMPOSTER!

Watchdogs in Anoka County District 1 are reporting that candidate and Good Ol' Person Natalie Steffen is distributing literature in which she proclaims herself to be a "watchdog."

Nice try, Natalie. There is only one true Watchdog in this county and his name is Harold Hamilton. He creates hundreds of private sector jobs, believes in free markets, shines the light of truth on career politicians and is the protector of truth, justice, and the American way around here.

You, on the other hand, are a career government bureaucrat/politician who has spent a lifetime collecting government checks and seeks to continue that entrenched career by being nothing more than an extension of what has come before you on the county board.

Calling yourself a watchdog is every bit as misleading as you labeling registered lobbyist donors as "businessmen."

But the Watchdog isn't the only organization out there keeping an eye on this Good Ol' Girl. A new blog called "You Think You Know Natalie?" has come on line to compare Steffen's rhetoric with the facts.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Harold Hamilton, The Anoka County Watchdog and The Minnesota Watchdog are not affiliated with this web site.

SPRING LAKE PARK SCHOOLS HAVE PLENTY OF MONEY

Here we go again. In the worst economy in generations, government employees continue to experience gains in compensation and benefits while the ones who fund those employees suffer wage and benefit cuts if they are lucky to avoid being laid off altogether.

This week's edition of the Blaine-Spring Lake Park Life offered an article that explained that custodians in the Spring Lake Park School District will receive a 4% increase in their wage and benefit package.

What's more offensive, this package was touted as being similar to the increases received by other district employees like teachers and food service workers.

Oh, that should make the taxpayers feel better.

Time for a survey. If you received a 4% increase at your private sector job this year, raise your hand, especially if you are a custodian in the private sector.

Maybe these wage and benefit packages should be tied to what their counterparts in the private sector make.

Keep this mind if you are taxpayer in this school district the next time they come around asking for a property tax levy increase because the district "has cut to the bone."

And we're not done with the Spring Lake Park School District.

This week's edition of the "Life" also featured an article on an employee of the District who sports the euphorian and feel-good title of "Coordinator of Equity, English Language Learners, and Federal Funds."

This person will make a salary of \$86,000 annually to "work with staff to create a welcoming and safe environment for the children, parents and communities."

Hit the Garage Logic Duluth Fog Horn a few hundred times, please.

Beam me up, Scotty!

MUST WATCH VIDEO

Check out the trailer for the most anticipated documentary in many years. "Waiting for Superman" is produced by the same talent that gave us "An Inconvenient Truth" and shines a similarly bright light on our failed public schools. Waiting for Superman chronicles the stories of young children who struggle to obtain a decent education in a government schools monopoly run by the teacher union cartel.

Next, watch rising superstar New Jersey Governor Chris Christie absolutely destroy a teacher union hack who tries her hand at arguing with the former federal prosecutor.

Christie lays the smack down with a combination of logic and unapologetic straight talk.

Mess with bull, you get the horns!

E-mail Update 9/20/10

In This Issue:

1. Birthday Bash Update.
2. Northstar Rail is a Money Suck.
3. Jerry Newton One Ups Obama on Health Care.
4. Get to Know Andover's Good Ol' Boy DFL Mayor.

BIRTHDAY BASH UPDATE

Anticipation continues to build as the Watchdog's fifth anniversary blow out approaches. Hundreds of Watchdogs will be on hand to help THE Watchdog, Harold Hamilton, celebrate five years of holding politicians accountable in Anoka County.

A bevy of political candidates will be on hand to meet you personally and answer your questions. No other event in Anoka County will bring together this many candidates in one place.

In addition to the many candidates who have announced that they will attend, just this week three more candidates have been added to the event:

- Ron Bouley, candidate for Anoka County Sheriff
- Julie Braastad, seeking re-election to the Ham Lake city council
- State Representative Bob Dettmer

If you're a candidate running this November, contact the Anoka County Watchdog to reserve your place at the bash. Send your request to harold@anokacountywatchdog.com.

SPECIAL GUEST CONFIRMED!

Minnesota House Minority Leader Kurt Zellers has confirmed his attendance as a Special Guest and keynote speaker! Minority Leader Zellers will give us an update on legislative races across the state as well as the agenda for House Republicans in the 2011 legislative session. With Republicans set to make large gains in the legislature, Zellers could very well be the Speaker of the House come January.

Harold Hamilton is pleased to welcome Rep. Zellers and Commissioner Rhonda Sivarajah as his special guests and keynote speakers.

Let's also take a moment to cover some administrative notes.

Some have asked how much tickets cost for the event. As always, the event is free of charge and open to all Watchdogs.

Again, Harold Hamilton has strongly encouraged all attendees to wear their Watchdog t-shirts. If you wear your shirt, you may win some cool Watchdog swag.

SEPTEMBER 30

MAJESTIC OAKS IN HAM LAKE

6-7 pm (social hour)

7-8 pm (program)

8-9 pm (birthday cake and fellowship)

Are you fired up and ready to vote? Be there!

NORTHSTAR RAIL IS A MONEY SUCK

You're probably asking yourself why the Watchdog thinks this is news. After all, you've known Northstar rail is a boondoggle all along, right?

This is news because of new developments regarding Northstar and commuter rail in general this week.

First, the Star Tribune reported this week that Northstar has missed its ridership projections and is running about 3% below what was expected.

While missing the target by 3% may not seem to be an issue, the problem becomes apparent when weekday commuter riders are compared to weekend leisure riders heading down to Target Field to take in a Twins game.

It turns out that there are nearly as many people taking the train to see a game as there are taking the train into Minneapolis for work each day.

Take this past July, for example. That month, the average daily commuter ridership was 2,530. On a Saturday when the Twins were playing at home, average leisure ridership was 2,373.

So, there nearly as many people taking the train to catch a game as there are taking the train to work on a weekday.

Remember when the \$317 million train was sold to the taxpayers as a transportation option for commuters? It turns out that an argument can be made that Northstar is little more than a taxpayer-subsidized tool catering to baseball fans looking for a ride to a taxpayer-subsidized baseball yard.

Evidence of Northstar's underperformance is especially critical on two fronts.

For one, the limited ridership is proving the claims of critics like the Anoka County Watchdog that predicted the train would prove to be a financial white elephant demanding massive, long-term taxpayer subsidies.

Those fears have proven correct, based upon subsidy data collected by our good friends over at the Freedom Foundation of Minnesota.

According to these statistics, Northstar commuter rail is suffering an operating deficit of over \$1 million per month!

Perhaps the most shocking and disappointing statistic is that taxpayers subsidize a whopping 83% of the cost of every Northstar ride, while the rider only covers 17% (called the "fare box recovery").

It breaks down like this:

Each one-way trip costs on average \$22.37

Each rider pays an average one-way trip cost of \$3.74

The taxpayers pony up the difference for each and every trip.

Through July 31st, taxpayers have subsidized Northstar's operations to the tune of over \$7.5 million!

Perhaps this is why, as reported in the Watchdog recently, the Anoka County Regional Rail Authority is proposing to raise its property tax levy a whopping 45% next year.

It is critical that readers understand that one of the reasons Anoka County is raising the levy is to provide capital and funds to pursue not only an EXPANSION of Northstar rail but also a brand new commuter train line to Duluth, called Northern Lights Express.

Despite irrefutable evidence of missed ridership projections and massive subsidies, Anoka County commissioners are doubling down on commuter rail with billions of your tax dollars riding on the bet.

Watchdogs had better be asking county commissioner candidates where they stand on the "commuter rail bet."

You'll have your chance on September 30th.

JERRY NEWTON ONE UPS OBAMA ON HEALTH CARE

State Representative Jerry Newton (DFL-Coon Rapids) runs the same cookie-cutter campaign as all suburban DFL legislative candidates, voting like a liberal in Saint Paul and then campaigning as a "moderate" back home.

The Watchdog has examined Newton's voting record on fiscal issues, where it could be fairly concluded that Newton is a liberal tax-and-spender on most fiscal issues.

So what about health care? With Obamacare being rammed down the throats of the American public and a majority opposed to this type of command and control government-run health care, where does Newton stand on government's role in your health care?

A review of legislation Newton has sponsored shows he must love Obamacare because Newton himself sponsored a bill that, if passed into law, would have been nothing short of Obamacare on steroids.

One of Newton's first acts upon assuming office in January of 2009 was to co-sponsor the "Minnesota Health Act," a bill which would establish, universal, government-run health care in Minnesota. In short, it is the big kahuna health care dream of the most ardent liberal. It's truly Obamacare on steroids.

Watchdog's who live in Newton's district had better be asking him at the door and at candidate forums why he thinks universal, government-run health care is a good idea.

To be honest, the Watchdog is a bit surprised, given the overwhelming opposition to Obamacare, that this legislation hasn't received more attention.

Then again, that's why the Watchdog exists.

GET TO KNOW ANDOVER'S GOOD OL' BOY DFL MAYOR

Andover is the heart of the county and the heart of Watchdog country. Andover consistently elects conservative candidates who believe in free markets and limited government.

Because of this fact, liberals seeking office frequently do so in non-partisan races so they can mask their true colors.

Such appears to be the case for Andover Mayor Mike Gamache, who we have outed in the past as a Good Ol' Boy and staunch democrat (yes, we recall the one time he ran as a partisan DFLer and got whooped).

Because Gamache is running for re-election (yet again), we thought it worthwhile to point out the kind of candidates he's endorsed this year:

- Natalie Steffen (Northstar supporter and Met Council executive)
- Andy Westerberg (Northstar supporter and Vikings stadium supporter)
- Scott's Wife (does she have a plan for anything beyond WWSD?)
- Tom Rukavina for governor (didn't work out so well)

It would indeed be ironic if Andover went big for Michele Bachmann, Michelle Benson, Peggy Scott, Tom Emmer... and Mike Gamache. One of these things is not like the other, one of these things just isn't the same...

E-mail Update 9/27/10

In This Issue:

1. The Last Birthday Bash Update.
2. We've Got a Crush.
3. Judging the Judges.
4. Candidate Statement.

BIRTHDAY BASH UPDATE

This is it, Watchdogs! This is the last update before Thursday night's gala event.

Here is the latest update regarding candidates who will be in attendance:

state Representative Tom Hackbarth;
Greg Sloat for Anoka County Commissioner;
Christopher Penwell for judge;
Tad Jude for judge;
James Stuart for Anoka County Sheriff;
Tom Johnson, Ham Lake City Council;
Harry Niska for Ramsey City Council;
Donna Schmidt for Columbia Heights City Council.

Also, there is a possibility that we may be joined by Congresswoman Michele Bachmann and Congressman John Kline. Their appearance will be dictated by their schedules, especially the calendar in Washington, currently controlled by Nancy Pelosi until new management is installed in January.

Again, we will be holding the party at Majestic Oaks in Ham Lake

Thursday, September 30
6-9 PM

The agenda is as follows:

6-7 PM: Social Hour

7-8 PM: Formal Program

- Remarks from Harold Hamilton
- Remarks from Commissioner Sivarajah
- Remarks from Minority Leader Kurt Zellers
- County Commissioner Candidate Forum
- Matt Look
- Debbie Johnson
- Andy Westerberg
- Robyn West
- Greg Sloat

* (Natalie Steffen, Mike Bourke, and Jim Kordiak failed to respond to our invitation.)

Each candidate will have Up to 3 minutes to make an opening statement.

After that, candidates will take questions from the audience (microphones will be provided).

Remarks from Reps. Bachmann and Kline (invited, not confirmed)

8-9 PM: Fellowship. Cake will be served to honor the Dog's 5th birthday.

RULES FOR ALL CANDIDATES

Only candidates running for an office that will represent Anoka County taxpayers in whole or in part will be allowed to campaign.

Tables will be provided for literature.

Campaign materials should be limited to brochures, t-shirts, stickers, buttons, and other small items.

Do not bring banners, lawn signs, or other large campaign items into the banquet hall.

Do not affix anything to the walls.

The formal program is final. Unfortunately, if you haven't been invited to speak, you will not be able to make any formal remarks from the dais.

The good news is that there will be hundreds of concerned citizens willing and eager to meet you, shake your hand, and listen to your campaign pitch. In short, this is retail politics at its best.

Finally, please clean up after your campaign. If your campaign packed it in, please pack it out.

ARE YOU FIRED UP AND READY TO VOTE? SEE YOU THURSDAY, WATCHDOGS!

WE'VE GOT A CRUSH

Watchdogs in Ham Lake, East Bethel, Oak Grove, Andover, Blaine and Coon Rapids, take note.

On October 9th, a "Tax Crush" rally will be held at the Ham Lake VFW to rally conservative voters.

Candidates running for office at the local and state level will be there, including:

Michelle Benson (candidate for state Senate)
Rep. Peggy Scott (re-election candidate for state Representative)
Ron Bouley (candidate for sheriff)
Commissioner Robyn West (re-election candidate for county board)

Questions regarding this event should be directed to Mike Van Kirk at mikevankirkheating@hotmail.com.

JUDGING THE JUDGES

Many Watchdogs have written us looking for information regarding judges and how to obtain information.

Sadly, good information isn't available in one convenient place. This is true in part because many judges obfuscate their decisions and do little to make their views transparent to voters.

The Watchdog doesn't endorse candidates for office, but we can publish the web sites of judges who have offered a view of the role of the judiciary that emphasizes judicial restraint, the rule of law, and the role of judges as interpreters and not writers of law.

Check out these web sites and decide for yourself:

MN Supreme Court
Greg Wersal
Tim Tinglestad
MN Court of Appeals
Dan Griffith
10th Judicial District (includes Anoka County)
Tad Jude
Chris Penwell

CANDIDATE STATEMENT

Harry Niska, running for a seat on the Ramsey City Council, took us up on our invitation to publish candidate statements. Here it is:

I believe strongly in your right, as a citizen and taxpayer, to responsive and responsible government at all levels. I am running for city council to listen to you and to work for you. The hard-working families of Ramsey cannot afford wasteful and unresponsive government.

If elected, I will stand for responsible budgets, transparent and accountable government, and sensible economic development.

Responsible Budgets

The first priority of government is to spend the taxpayers' money wisely by making government more efficient and effective. I applaud the work done recently by the current city council to cut back on some of the bloat that had happened under previous councils. We must continue to relentlessly search for new ways we can cut taxes and create more value for the taxpayer.

Transparent and Accountable Government

Fundamental to our system of government is the right of the citizens to be informed about what the government is doing and to hold their elected officials accountable. I will work for continued improvements in this area, including advocating for more information available online or on television. We should make proposed ordinances and budgets easily available online and strive to make information as accessible and user-friendly as possible.

Sensible Economic Development

Economic development will raise the standard of living for everyone in Ramsey, and the city absolutely should foster the creation of new places for Ramsey residents to work, eat, and shop, but development plans must be realistic and cost effective. We must learn lessons from the mistakes of the past (especially regarding Town Center), and together we can make Ramsey a great place to live, work, and do business.

Deep Roots In Anoka County and a Commitment to Service

Although I recently moved to Ramsey, my roots in western Anoka County run deep. In the 1940s, my grandparents owned a dairy farm in Ramsey, where my father spent his grade school years. I grew up in western Andover, and was educated in the Anoka-Hennepin public schools. I graduated from Anoka High School, Concordia College (Moorhead) and the University of Minnesota Law School. Then I left the state of Minnesota for a few years, first accepting the call to serve as a clerk for a federal judge in Sioux Falls before taking a job at a private law firm in Chicago.

During my time in South Dakota and Illinois, I met and married his best friend Jennifer, and we had a son Nathanael, who is now three. After we tired of the gridlock and political corruption of Illinois, and when the right opportunity came to return to Minnesota, we decided to make Ramsey their home.

Since last year, I have served on the Ramsey Charter Commission. The Charter Commission has been an excellent public service opportunity, and I would love the chance to serve the people of Ramsey in a greater role on the City Council.

I can be reached by phone at 763-489-VOTE (8683) or by email at harry@harryniska.com. His campaign website is www.harryniska.com. You can also

find me on Facebook (facebook.com/VoteForHarry) or Twitter (twitter.com/VoteForHarry).

E-mail Update 10/4/10

In This Issue:

1. Birthday Bash Wrap Up.
2. LEA Scorecard is Out.
3. Candidate Statement.

BIRTHDAY BASH WRAP UP

It was an awesome night of good food, great candidates, and even better conservative fellowship.

Nearly 300 Watchdogs gathered at Majestic Oaks in Ham Lake for an old fashioned political revival meeting, hearing from leaders in the vanguard of Minnesota's conservative movement, including gubernatorial candidate Tom Emmer, Secretary of State candidate Dan Severson, House Minority Leader Kurt Zellers and Anoka County Commissioner Rhonda Sivarajah.

The excitement level was high and the same energy that has motivated voters across the country to elect conservative leaders like Scott Brown in Massachusetts and Chris Christie in New Jersey was on full display.

Oh yeah, the cake was pretty darn good, too.

Harold Hamilton thanks all the Watchdogs out there who took time out of their schedules to join him in celebration. He appreciates your readership and your involvement in shaping America's future.

Here's to many more years of the Watchdog!

See you on the high ground on election day!

LEA SCORECARD IS OUT

Watchdogs want to know how to evaluate candidates for office because they want to cast an informed vote for the candidates who best represent their values and worldview.

Much like the Taxpayer's League of Minnesota, the Legislative Evaluation Assembly (LEA) compiles a legislative scorecard rating our state legislators after every session.

And like the Taxpayer's League, this scorecard offers an excellent metric to gauge how committed a legislator is to the conservative ethos of smaller government and greater individual liberty.

The LEA scorecard is a nice compliment to the Taxpayer's League scorecard because the LEA scores both fiscal and social issue votes.

So how did our Anoka County delegation stack up? Take a look:

EDITOR'S NOTE: The LEA scorecard is a bit different in that it allows for negative scores because legislators were also penalized for missing votes.

Legislator	District	Party	2010 Score	Lifetime Score
Sen. Don Betzold	51	DFL	0	8
Sen. Satveer Chaudhary	50	DFL	-7	9
Sen. Leo Foley	47	DFL	10	15
Sen. Debbie Johnson	49	R	52	61
Sen. Mike Jungbauer	48	R	58	64
Sen. Sandy Rummel*	53	DFL	-2	2
Sen. Ray Vanderveer	52	R	81	80
Rep. Jim Abeler**	48B	R	2	44
Rep. Tim Sanders	51A	R	57	62
Rep. Tom Tillberry	51B	DFL	0	0
Rep. Carolyn Laine	50A	DFL	0	0
Rep. Denise Dittrich*	47A	DFL	8	18
Rep. Melissa Hortman*	47B	DFL	0	8
Rep. Peggy Scott	49A	R	61	72
Rep. Jerry Newton*	49B	DFL	0	0
Rep. Tom Hackbarth***	48A	R	83	73
Rep. Paul Gardner*	53A	DFL	0	2
Rep. Bob Dettmer	52A	R	71	78

* Denotes self-proclaimed "suburban moderate."

** Low GOP score 2010

*** High GOP score 2010

CANDIDATE STATEMENT

Submitted by Alan Williams, candidate for Coon Rapids City Council

Alan Williams for Coon Rapids Ward 5 Council:

27 Years ago, I landed in Coon Rapids from Liverpool England. Coon Rapids was the best place in the world for me. In the last 15 years, I have seen the Coon Rapids decline. We are spending money on unessential services without getting voter input. We are building a new hockey arena for around \$13m when we could have updated and expanded Cook Arena for around \$2m (see the engineering report on the website below). We have purchased land at the cost of \$16 - \$25m which is stagnant (Opposite

Lilly Putt on CRB). We are flipping homes. We are using the City government as a go between for neighbors, checking on the grass length, posting notes on homes with long grass, without regard for the possibility that the resident may be ill or in financial trouble.

We just banned the feeding of wild animals on PRIVATE AND PUBLIC PROPERTY. Don't look forward to the great American pastime of taking the grand kids to feed the ducks. We seem to make decisions based on the litigation risk factor. We shut water off to empty homes in the summer without regard for a possible sprinkler system that may be installed. We pay our city manager about 30% more (about \$170K) than neighboring cities.

Coon Rapids blvd is still an eyesore. We are spending lots of tax dollars on unessential services without getting voter input. We shut down open mic broadcast (that pesky litigation risk factor again) without regard for sick or disabled people. Our jobs rate has declined in the last 9 years to a negative number while neighbor cities have increased to the tune, in some cases, of double digits. We have some of the highest business franchise fees in Minnesota (check your Comcast bill for the "public education Government" fees)

And the ultimate insult?..... My opponent who quit his council seat last April is asking you to "re-seat" him.

Performance of the same old, same old, will not produce different results. I quit complaining and decided to run against Bruce Sanders the "Non-incumbent" I have fresh ideas and would like the chance to work for the residents of Coon Rapids. For more information, please visit www.coonrapidsward.com and please make certain to vote on November 2nd.

Thanks

Prepared by Alan Williams. 10744 Yellow Pine Street, Coon Rapids, MN 55433

E-mail Update 10/11/10

In This Issue:

1. A "Fair Chance" is a Farce.
2. Meunier Supports Education Cuts.
3. The Company We Keep.
4. Playing Both Sides of the Street.
5. Forest Lake Taxpayer Alert!

A "FAIR CHANCE" IS A FARCE

DFL state Senate candidate Paul Meunier continues to run his stealth candidacy of refusing to acknowledge his true liberal beliefs and the support he has garnered from like-minded liberal special interests.

For example, his web site offers no concrete views on the issues other than vague "principles" that don't clearly tell us how he would vote on taxes, business regulations, public pensions, abortion and the like.

Like we do with all candidates for office, the Watchdog has a principle mission of calling out stealth candidates who hide behind slogans, double talk, and euphemisms.

But we also rely on our Watchdog readers to put on their hip boots and turn on their BS detectors whenever and wherever politicians lay down the meunier, er, manure.

One such Watchdog did some research and wrote a letter regarding Meunier himself.

Letter follows:

Recently, I have been watching our State Senate debates on local cable. Incumbent democrat Ham Lake Mayor Paul Meunier has attempted to cast himself as beyond partisan politics, a moderate, and framing the issues as a centrist.

However, after Googling Paul Meunier's name to find out more information on where he stands on the issues, I discovered some stubborn facts that present a different side of Mr. Meunier. According to the Federal Election Commission, Mr. Meunier donated 10 times to Barrack Obama's 2008 Presidential campaign. His donations totaled \$500, which qualify him as a major donor to the most liberal activist president of my life time.

Mr. Meunier also agrees with President Obama's changes to our health care system. During the North Metro Mayor's Association debate, he stated that he supported the next Governor's ability for an early opt-in to Obamacare. According to Meunier, Obamacare cannot happen soon enough.

In addition, Mr. Meunier was recruited to run for State Senate by an east coast far left-wing group called Progressive Majority. Progressive Majority's objective is to recruit far

left-wing candidates to run for public office nationwide. I guess the citizens in Senate District 49 shouldn't recruit their own candidates to represent them in the State Senate.

Finally, candidate Meunier has advertised a fundraiser with Saint Paul's Congresswomen Betty McCollum, who was ranked the "most liberal" member of Congress by the National Journal magazine. It just so happens, that it is the same day that Moveon.org has their rally event.

My conclusions are State Senate candidate Paul Meunier is just another far-left liberal politician that will say anything to get elected. Does this sound familiar to anyone? His support from far-left organizations, their policies, and their financial backing is enough for me to vote "No" to Paul Meunier. We deserve honesty.

MEUNIER SUPPORTS EDUCATION CUTS

The Saint Paul Pioneer Press featured a candidate profile this week between Paul Meunier and Michelle Benson, the candidates for the Senate District 49 seat.

DFL candidate Paul Meunier's comments were unique in that they were expected and surprising at the same time.

What was expected was his equivocating and parsing of words when he declared that he "prefers" not to raise taxes.

Just what the heck does that mean? It sounds very much like the "Fair Chance" talk we've heard about throughout this campaign.

Meunier really means he supports tax increases but doesn't want to come clean about how much and who gets the bill.

If the Watchdog is wrong, Meunier can feel free to send us the list of \$5.8 billion in state budget cuts he's willing to support and we'll be happy to publish it.

What was surprising about his remarks is that he supports cutting education, something that voters in Senate District 49 should find very interesting.

While he doesn't outright say it, it appears Meunier doesn't support making up the deficit through tax increases alone, meaning that there will have to be cuts.

Of those cuts, Meunier stated that "they need to be spread out evenly in all areas of the budget."

Obviously that means that education would take the same percentage cut as welfare, for example.

Very few legislators or candidates for the legislature have favored a budget cutting approach of simple across the board reductions.

Instead, most have favored prioritizing cuts by hitting less meritorious programs harder than more critical budget areas.

While the Watchdog praises Meunier for having the courage to support cutting our bloated government run schools, we're not sure this special interest is too pleased.

THE COMPANY WE KEEP

They say a man is known by the company he keeps. As long as we're examining the words and deeds of Paul Meunier, let's take a look at who he has featured as co-hosts at his next fundraiser:

- Dan Erhart, the Good Ol' Boy Godfather himself;
- Elwyn Tinklenberg, Good Ol' Boy, lobbyist and failed DFL candidate;
- Andover Mayor Mike Gamache (stealth DFLer)

Those names right there give you an idea of who this guy will consult for ideas if he's elected.

Will we get a "Fair Chance" to move out of the area if he wins?

PLAYING BOTH SIDES OF THE STREET

The Watchdog has pointed out that Anoka County commissioner candidate Andy Westerberg is playing both sides of the partisan street in his campaign by running as an endorsed Republican while also taking contributions from well-known liberal DFLers.

It looks like Westerberg isn't the only one wearing two jerseys on the political court.

Watchdogs in the Blaine area report that county commissioner candidate Mike Bourke is also playing both sides.

These sources state that Bourke showed up to Republican precinct caucuses this past spring and registered as a Republican delegate.

The same sources now say that Bourke is listed as a candidate worthy of support on a DFL-sponsored web site called "Blaine's future."

The web site link (www.blainesfuture.org) looks either broken or down at this time but the Watchdog has a screen grab showing that the DFL organization sponsoring the web site supports Bourke and Tarryl Clark, DFL candidate for Congress.

Moreover, Bourke's Facebook page shows many friends who are DFL luminaries.

And one other thing. Bourke refused to participate in the Watchdog's candidate forum last week.

Looks like we have another stealth candidate.

FOREST LAKE TAXPAYER ALERT!

A Watchdog in Forest Lake sends the following alert regarding a property tax levy referendum that will be on the ballot in November:

The Forest Lake School Board will have tax levy and a bond referendum questions on the November ballot.

The first is the straight tax levy and is for \$100 Million (\$100,000,000) for general operating expenses. It is \$10,000,000 per year for 10 years plus cost of living increase so it will end up to be more. This levy replaces the current levy that has one year left to run and represents a greater than 60% increase in property tax for this item. If this levy question fails, the current levy would remain in place for another year.

The second is a new bond issue for \$24 Million (\$24,000,000). The District says it will be used for school building repair and improvements, but has reserved the right to use it for any other purpose they want. Passage of this bond issue will increase property taxes to pay the principle and interest on the bonds for 20 years.

The impact on both residential and business properties will be significant. Whether you own or are a renter, you will be affected. To see the tax impact for your property, go to one of the following links:

Residential: <http://ptax.springsted.com/ptax/client/default.aspx?formName=res>

Agricultural: <http://ptax.springsted.com/ptax/client/default.aspx?formName=ag>

Commercial:

<http://ptax.springsted.com/ptax/client/default.aspx?formName=other> (choose commercial/industrial)

The school taxes are only a part of your total property tax bill. Other items are the local, county, state, and transit levies, all of which have potential increases, especially if your property value stayed the same or increased.

I urge you to consider the impact of these potential tax increases on your operating costs. If you would like to write a letter to the editor about it, here is the information:

Forest Lake Press: 350 word limit (shorter is better) and their deadline is Monday at noon for that week's paper. The last issue for all letters is October 20th and is October 27th for letters that support a particular point of view (they can't be negative of another's

position). The email address is: ForestLakeNews@PressPubs.com Remember to include your name, address, and phone number. Only your name will be published.

Forest Lake Times: (200 word limit and their deadline and letter policy is the same as the Press). The email address is: editor.forestlaketimes@ecm-inc.com

E-mail Update 10/18/10

In This Issue:

1. Watching the Imposter "Watchdog."
2. Voices of Conservative Women Roar.
3. Voting DFL in Andover?

EDITOR'S NOTE: Watchdogs, please be patient waiting for those always stylish and in-demand t-shirts. The coming conservative wave this election cycle has created unprecedented demand. Shirts are on back order and will be sent out just as soon as we get them in.

WATCHING THE "IMPOSTER" WATCHDOG

It's been simply amazing to witness all the candidates for office who are running as "conservatives," "Republicans," and even "Watchdogs," when they are nothing of the sort.

With the political environment toxic for liberal progressives, along with Anoka County's traditional right-tilting electorate, there is plenty of incentive for less than honest candidates to "go stealth" and hide their liberal progressive world view.

Last week, we shined the cleansing light of truth on state Senate candidate Paul Meunier, who is a far-left liberal who makes no mention of his ultra-liberal views in his campaign materials or the support he receives from liberal special interest groups located outside Minnesota.

Another such candidate is Natalie Steffen, running for county commissioner in District 1 against small business owner Matt Look.

Steffen has shamelessly sought to portray herself as a conservative watchdog of taxpayer dollars throughout her campaign.

Yet, glimmers of her true colors come through with her incessant talk of keeping Anoka County "progressive," which no doubt means supporting all manner of mass transit, mega projects like football stadiums, and the menu of Met Council initiatives like high density housing.

She is also out of touch with the reality of this campaign cycle. It appears that she is also inexplicably focused on the issue of Anoka County's bond rating, which is nothing more than a measure of the interest rates the county can expect to pay when it issues debt to finance capital projects.

Uh, Natalie. The taxpayers are out of work, overtaxed, and over-regulated. They care about jobs and the economy. They care about property taxes and what county

commissioners plan to do about putting a lid on them. They don't give a rip, frankly, about the county's damn bond rating.

Thankfully, there is a watchdog out there who is keeping an eye on this stealth candidate and keeping her accountable.

"You think you know Natalie" is a web site that has been doing its homework by keeping tabs on Steffen's current activities as well as doing research on her political past.

The web site has already uncovered strong evidence of her left-leaning views and attempt to snow local Republicans into believing she's one of us.

Did you know Natalie Steffen while serving on the Met Council voted to spend over \$100,000 to add the Somali language to light rail ticket machines?

Worst of all, she proclaimed that adding the language was some sort of fundamental human rights issue by stating, "I think we would be less as human beings if we can't make the decision to serve some people who are working very hard to assimilate into our society."

Really? We're all just a bunch of vicious, inhuman animals if we don't ask immigrants to actually learn our language and our culture? Doesn't sound very conservative to us.

Watchdogs also report Steffen showing up at Republican functions to claim genuine Republican bona fides.

This web site reports: Natalie is NOT A CONSERVATIVE. She rolled into the last Republican Senate District 48 meeting with her posse of (3) supporters and gave a 15 minute speech about how SHE is the conservative candidate in the race for District 1 and SHE has the Republican credentials. We haven't seen Natalie anywhere near a Republican or conservative event in Anoka County, district meeting or convention in at least the last 3 years.

If you're a voter who lives in District 1, you owe it to yourself to check in with this web site often.

VOICES OF CONSERVATIVE WOMEN ROAR

One of the inspirational aspects of this campaign season is seeing a new generation of conservative women step forward to help save our nation.

Led by Sarah Palin and Michele Bachmann, conservative women everywhere are at the leading edge of a conservative renaissance in America.

Anoka County can proudly claim that it's doing its part on this front as well.

Peggy Scott, Rhonda Sivarajah, Michelle Benson, Linda Runbeck, Robyn West, and others have literally taken the mantle of conservative leadership in the county and are charging full speed ahead to glorious victories in November and beyond.

It was thus nice to see some of these Anoka County leaders get recognition this week when some of them earned the endorsement of the Voices of Conservative Women, a group dedicated to electing conservative females, especially challengers who are new to politics.

The group has endorsed:

Michelle Benson, Senate District 49 candidate;
Debbie Johnson, Anoka County Commissioner candidate;
Robyn West, Anoka County Commissioner Candidate;
Julie Braastad, Ham Lake City Council candidate;
Donna Schmidt, Columbia Heights City Council candidate.
Congratulations, ladies!

VOTING DFL IN ANDOVER?

Any fair review of Andover's electorate has to conclude that it is a deep red town. The non-partisan and highly respected Politics in Minnesota newsletter calls the area "solidly Republican."

That evidence is borne out by the convincing victories Republicans have scored even in strong DFL years.

John McCain beat the Community Organizer in Chief by 20 points in 2008. That same year, Coleman whipped Franken 54-29. Michele Bachmann won there by an overwhelming 51-38 win as well.

Heck, the area even went for Mark Kennedy for Senate in 2006 when nearly every other corner of the state went for Klobuchar.

It's true red GOP country.

Given this history, the Watchdog asks voters in Andover the following question. If you're going to vote GOP in big numbers again this election, if you're going to vote for Bachmann, Benson, and Scott, why in the heck would you then vote for DFL Mayor Mike Gamache?

Think about it.

And for some added food for thought, take a look at this photo of your mayor actively campaigning for a liberal DFL state Senate candidate.

E-mail Update 10/25/10

In This Issue:

1. MetroNorth Chamber's Curious Endorsements.
2. Tinglestad Supports Horner.
3. Stealth Candidate Alert - Mike Bourke is "Non-Partisan?"

METRONORTH CHAMBER'S CURIOUS ENDORSEMENTS

Here they go again. The Metro North Chamber of Commerce, a member of the Good Ol' Boys network, has descended from on high to pronounce its list of favored candidates in the upcoming election. (The Chamber some years ago formed a political action committee to directly engage in political activity.)

While the Chamber made some solid endorsements (e.g Peggy Scott, Tim Sanders, Linda Runbeck), they also endorsed candidates with spotty pro-business credentials or failed to endorse candidates who have been very supportive of pro-capitalist policies and initiatives.

Let's take a look at some of the Chamber PAC's decisions and compare them against the viewpoint of the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce, the National Federation of Independent Business (NFIB), and the Taxpayer's League of Minnesota (TLM) to give our readers a frame of reference against which to judge the actions of the MetroNorth Chamber PAC.

DISTRICT 47 B: STATE REPRESENTATIVE MELISSA HORTMAN

The Chamber PAC endorsed current state Representative Melissa Hortman, with one source telling the Watchdog that Hortman was endorsed because, "she thinks like the Chamber."

Really? Let's see what our three organizations have had to say about her voting record and her point of view regarding jobs and the economy.

THE MINNESOTA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

In 2009, Hortman voted with the Minnesota Chamber just twice on 13 scored pro-business votes.

In 2010, Hortman voted with the Minnesota Chamber just once on 7 scored pro-business votes.

During the 2009-2010 legislative session, Hortman voted with the Chamber just 3 times on 20 scored votes, for an aggregate score of 15% on pro-business votes.

Like Metro North Chamber, the Minnesota Chamber has a political action committee that directly endorses and supports candidates for office.

Unlike the MetroNorth Chamber, the Minnesota Chamber did not endorse Melissa Hortman.
NFIB

The NFIB represents small, "main street" businesses across Minnesota and the entire country.

The NFIB did not endorse at the legislative level this year but the group did produce a scorecard.

For the 2009-2010 legislative session, Hortman voted with the NFIB just 18% of the time on their key, scored votes.

TAXPAYERS LEAGUE OF MN

While the TLM isn't technically an organization designed to support pro-business legislation, it's most certainly a pro-capitalist organization that seeks to promote economic prosperity by promoting limited government and individual liberty.

For the 2010 session, Hortman earned a perfect score of "zero."

For her legislative career, Hortman has voted with the TLM only 10% on key, scored votes.

In sum, Hortman hasn't voted with these three organizations even 20% of the time. She also wasn't endorsed by the Minnesota Chamber PAC.

So how did she earn the endorsement of the MetroNorth Chamber PAC? How can any reasonable person view Hortman's voting record and conclude that she is pro-business? This one smells to high heaven.

STATE REPRESENTATIVE TOM HACKBARTH

Strangely, the MetroNorth Chamber PAC didn't endorse state Representative Tom Hackbarth. Now it's entirely possible Hackbarth didn't want the endorsement and didn't seek it. If so, that's an indictment of the MetroNorth Chamber since Hackbarth is a long-serving House member with a sterling pro-business voting record who has deep ties to Anoka County.

On the other hand, if he did seek the endorsement and didn't get it, it heaps yet more suspicion on the MetroNorth Chamber PAC endorsement process.

There is a third possibility that the Chamber PAC didn't even consider this district in its endorsement process. If true, that's a disservice to the county's business owners, considering the credentials of Hackbarth, which are listed below.

THE MINNESOTA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

2009: Hackbarth voted against the Chamber position only once on 13 scored votes.

2010: Hackbarth voted against the Chamber position only once on 7 scored votes.

For the 2009-2010 bi-ennium, Hackbarth earned a score of 90%.

It is also significant to note that Hackbarth has earned the ENDORSEMENT of the Minnesota Chamber PAC.

NFIB

For the 2009-2010 legislative bi-ennium, Hackbarth earned a perfect 100% score from the NFIB.

TAXPAYERS LEAGUE OF MINNESOTA

For the 2010 legislative session, Hackbarth earned a solid 87% score from the TLM and has a respectable 78% lifetime score.

Hackbarth is clearly a solid pro-business advocate who either didn't think enough of the MetroNorth Chamber to seek their PAC endorsement or he didn't get it from them. Either way, it doesn't paint the Chamber in a very good light.

STATE SENATOR MIKE JUNGBAUER

Everything that was said about Rep. Hackbarth can also be said of state Senator Mike Jungbauer.

Like Hackbarth, Jungbauer is ENDORSED by the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce. Jungbauer obviously earned the endorsement by voting against the Chamber position only twice during the 2009-2010 session.

NFIB

Like Hackbarth, Jungbauer had a perfect 100% score for the 2009-2010 legislative session.

TAXPAYERS LEAGUE OF MINNESOTA

Jungbauer earned an excellent 92% rating from the TLM for the 2010 legislative session and boasts a solid 80% lifetime score.

How two outstanding pro-business legislators like Hackbarth and Jungbauer were missed by the MetroNorth Chamber while Melissa Hortman was not is just a bit curious.

The Watchdog invites the MetroNorth Chamber to respond, especially telling our readers why Melissa Hortman is good for jobs and our struggling economy.

COUNTY COMMISSIONER RACES

We would be remiss if didn't also mention two county commissioner races where the MetroNorth Chamber got involved by endorsing the candidates favored by the Good Ol' Boys.

In District 1, the Chamber endorsed Natalie Steffen, who has spent a lifetime in government and is trying to get elected to a government job she has already held! Moreover, Steffen is currently a member of the Met Council, which has been no friend to freedom loving folks in Anoka County.

Steffen has run a campaign to keep Anoka County "progressive," which is code for "big spending." She is also focused on keeping the county's bond rating, an issue that voters couldn't care less about.

On the other hand, the Chamber rejected Matt Look, Steffen's opponent and a man who runs his own small business and is focused on keeping taxes low and county government in check.

Over in District 2, it comes as no surprise that the Chamber endorsed Andy Westerberg over Debbie Johnson.

Westerberg is exactly the kind of candidate the Chamber would love, what with his support of a Vikings stadium, Northstar rail and even more trains and whistle stops.

TINGLESTAD SUPPORTS HORNER

Anyone who drives by former GOP state Representative and current Anoka County government employee Kathy Tingelstad's Andover home will see the Tom Horner for governor sign proudly displayed in her yard.

Now Tinglestad certainly has the right to support the candidate of her choice.

Having said that, she aggressively sought the GOP endorsement for herself throughout her legislative career.

Moreover, she continues to participate in the GOP process by seeking election as a delegate to party functions, including endorsing conventions.

So, it appears that Tinglestad favors the party endorsement process under certain circumstances but disses the endorsement process when it comes to the man the Party duly endorsed for governor.

Perhaps the GOP delegates in Tinglestad's district will remember this lack of support for Emmer the next time she wants to be a part of the endorsement process by seeking election as a delegate.

Supporting Horner, veto overrides, and commuter rail is no way to support the Party platform!

STEALTH CANDIDATE ALERT - MIKE BOURKE IS "NON-PARTISAN?"

The Watchdog 's mission, in part, is to call out candidates who say one thing and do another. We shine the light of truth whenever our BS detector flashes red.

One such candidate is Mike Bourke, running for Anoka County Commissioner.

Bourke recently decried partisan politics in a Star Tribune article. Said Bourke, "These are really non-party politics. Let's keep it that way. I love my community. I want to represent the people of Anoka County and not a special-interest group."

Really? Then why is Bourke supported by the local DFL Party in his area?

Bourke can back up his words regarding non-partisanship by publically calling on the local DFL to withdraw his name and Facebook link from their partisan web site.

E-mail Update 11/1/10

In This Issue:

ELECTION EVE SPECIAL! ENOUGH OF THE ADS, THE DEBATES, AND THE MAILERS. LET'S GET READY TO RUMBLE! IT'S TIME TO VOTE!

VOTE ON TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 2!

SEE YOU AT THE POLLS!

EDITOR'S NOTE: Below you will find links to all the resources you need to cast an informed vote on election day.

VOTING INFORMATION

Who's On My Ballot And Where Do I Vote?

Am I Registered To Vote?

Check Status Of Your Absentee Ballot.

Election Day Registration.

Minnesota Voter's Bill of Rights.

ANOKA COUNTY WATCHDOG CANDIDATE INFORMATION

County Commissioner Candidate Statements.

Also visit the Watchdog web site to review candidates and government in the news.

PRO-JOBS ENDORSEMENTS

Check the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce PAC endorsements to see candidates considered truly pro-jobs.

BIG GOVERNMENT ENDORSEMENTS

Review these endorsements to see which candidates pandered to the Big Government crowd.

Education Minnesota.

AFL-CIO.

AFSCME (Be sure to scan to the bottom to see local endorsements for Anoka County)

Teamsters.

LEGISLATIVE SCORECARDS FROM PRO-JOBS/CONSERVATIVE GROUPS

Taxpayer's League of Minnesota.

Minnesota Legislative Evaluation Assembly

Minnesota Chamber of Commerce
NFIB

LEGISLATIVE SCORECARDS FROM LIBERAL-BIG GOVERNMENT GROUPS

See which candidates earned praise for voting for Big Government and against liberty.

AFL-CIO.
AFSCME.
Sierra Club.

CANDIDATE WEB SITES

The candidates below share a world view that believes in limited government, personal liberty, and free market economics as the best pathway to prosperity.

Governor: Tom Emmer
Secretary of State: Dan Severson
State Auditor: Pat Anderson
Attorney General: Chris Barden
Congress Sixth District: Michele Bachmann
Congress Third District: Erik Paulsen
State Supreme Court: Greg Wersal, Tim Tingelstad
Minnesota Court of Appeals: Dan Griffith

SELECT LEGISLATIVE CANDIDATE WEB SITES

(Be sure to look for the web sites of legislative candidates in your area as this list is not comprehensive).

Senate District 47: Benjamin Kruse
Senate District 49: Michelle Benson
Senate District 53: Roger Chamberlain
House District 47A: Cameron Roberson
House District 49B: Branden Petersen
House District 51A: Tim Sanders
House District 53A: Linda Runbeck
District 10 Judge: Chris Penwell, Tad Jude

ANOKA COUNTY COMMISSIONER (Select Races)

District 1: Matt Look
District 2: Debbie Johnson
District 3: Robyn West
District 4: Greg Sloat

CITY COUNCIL (Select Races)

Columbia Heights: Donna Schmitt

Ramsey: Harry Niska

Coon Rapids: Alan Williams

Ham Lake: Mike Van Kirk (Mayor)

Ham Lake: Julie Braastad

INSPIRATION

We don't know Gary Hubbell, but he has penned one heck of a column in the Aspen Times way back in February that perfectly captures the mood of so many Americans as we head into the election tomorrow. The whole column can be read here.

Here's an excerpt:

Average Americans who have quietly gone about their lives, earning a paycheck, contributing to their favorite charities, going to high school football games on Friday night, spending their weekends at the beach or on hunting trips - they've gotten off the fence. They've woken up. There is a level of political activism in this country that we haven't seen since the American Revolution, and Barack Obama has been the catalyst that has sparked a restructuring of the American political and social consciousness.

Think of the crap we've slowly learned to tolerate over the past 50 years as liberalism sought to re-structure the America that was the symbol of freedom and liberty to all the people of the world. Immigration laws were ignored on the basis of compassion. Welfare policies encouraged irresponsibility, the fracturing of families, and a cycle of generations of dependency. Debt was regarded as a tonic to lubricate the economy. Our children left school having been taught that they are exceptional and special, while great numbers of them cannot perform basic functions of mathematics and literacy. Legislators decided that people could not be trusted to defend their own homes, and stripped citizens of their rights to own firearms. Productive members of society have been penalized with a heavy burden of taxes in order to support legions of do-nothings who loll around, reveling in their addictions, obesity, indolence, ignorance and "disabilities." Criminals have been arrested and re-arrested, coddled and set free to pillage the citizenry yet again. Lawyers routinely extort fortunes from doctors, contractors and business people with dubious torts.

We slowly learned to tolerate these outrages, shaking our heads in disbelief, and we went on with our lives.

But Barack Obama has ripped the lid off a seething cauldron of dissatisfaction and unrest...

E-mail Update 11/3/10

**SPECIAL POST-ELECTION UPDATE
SHOCK THE WORLD EDITION!
GOP CRUSHES DFL! WATCHDOGS WIN BIG!
ANOKA COUNTY LEADS THE WAY.**

It was indeed a historic night across Anoka County, Minnesota, and the entire country. Barack Obama's massive governmental overreach and invasive policies were harshly repudiated by an electorate alarmed by Washington's assault on our liberties and freedoms.

As of this writing, Republicans gained a net of 61 seats in the U.S. House, a gain bigger than those seen in 1994 and 1946.

In the Senate, it appears that the Republicans now have 46 seats with 2 more still to be decided. In any case, it doesn't matter all that much since a party needs at least 60 seats to invoke cloture and stop a filibuster.

Here in Minnesota, the political earthquake was Chip Cravaack's unseating of entrenched mega-porker Jim Oberstar. Oberstar's defeat was perhaps the most shocking defeat any incumbent House member suffered in the entire country. Meanwhile, Tom Emmer is locked in a too-close-to-call race with Mark Dayton, which is almost surely bound for recall.

The biggest news in Minnesota is that Republicans blew up from small minorities in both the state House and Senate to capture the majority in both bodies, including the state Senate for the first time since party designation was re-introduced in 1974.

(For a more detailed analysis of national and state races, look for an update from our sister publication, the Minnesota Watchdog.)

Now let's get down to the brass tacks here in Anoka County.

FEDERAL RACES

The Sixth District covers the most real estate of any congressional seat in the county. In this race, Watchdog rock star Michele Bachmann easily handled a challenge from liberal state Senator Tarryl Clark.

Bachmann's 12 point beating on Clark was fueled in large part by Bachmann winning 53% of the Anoka County vote in this race, compared to Clark's 39%.

Bachmann raised a record amount of money for a U.S. House candidate and has seen her star rise fast. Entering just her third term this coming January, she has announced she is running for the number 3 slot in the House GOP leadership ranks.

In the third congressional district, which covers parts of Coon Rapids, rising star Erik Paulsen won in Anoka County in convincing fashion with a 56-38 win over virtual unknown Jim Meffert.

STATEWIDE RACES

Here's how state-wide candidates fared in Anoka County.

Republican Tom Emmer waxed Mark Dayton 49-38, for an 11 point edge.

Republican Dan Severson beat incumbent Mark Ritchie in the Secretary of State race 51-43.

Likewise, Republican Pat Anderson beat DFLer Rebecca Otto 51-44.

Conversely, the DFL did win Anoka County for the attorney general slot, with Lori Swanson beating Republican Chris Barden by a narrow 2 point margin.

LEGISLATIVE RACES

Like much of the rest of the state, the GOP cleaned up in Anoka County, winning some DFL seats and not losing a single one of their own.

Here are the top 5 legislative races in Anoka County from election night, in order of importance.

1. Don Betzold vs. Pam Wolf (Senate District 51)

One of the most surprising results from anywhere in the state, teacher Pam Wolf came out of nowhere to topple DFL state Senator Don Betzold in District 51.

Betzold, of Fridley, was an 18-year incumbent who had bested Wolf by a comfortable 9 points in 2006.

A committee chairman, Betzold had never won massive victories in the district but was always helped by large expenditures made on his behalf.

Wolf truly prevailed in a David versus Goliath match up and will bring a fresh perspective, especially on fiscal issues.

Betzold is infamous in Watchdog lore as once telling Harold Hamilton regarding Northstar rail, "It doesn't matter what it costs. It's the right thing to do."

Betzold's profile in the Politics in Minnesota Capitol directory notes that he is an amateur photographer who plans to donate his pictures of the Capitol to the Historical Society when he retires.

That number is 651-259-3000.

2. Leo Foley vs. Benjamin Kruse (Senate District 47)

Anoka County played a large part in delivering the Republican surge that brought them majority status in the state Senate.

DFL incumbent Leo Foley had always managed to survive his races, where in four previous election cycles he never got more than 50% of the vote.

Foley's luck ran out this year as Benjamin Kruse finally took out Foley with a narrow victory.

It was somewhat surprising that Foley ran for re-election, given that rumors have run rampant regarding the octogenarian's health.

Most political observers remark that Foley ran a lackluster campaign, with Kruse's not much better.

Even though state Senators normally serve a four year term, Kruse and other Senators will stand for re-election in 2012 after redistricting.

Kruse is sure to be challenged by a more energetic candidate that year, perhaps state Rep. Melissa Hortman or state Rep. Denise Dittrich.

Kruse needs to begin preparing for that race today.

3. Jerry Newton vs. Branden Petersen (House District 49B)

This race wasn't too surprising to the Watchdog, which noted that despite the DFL lore surrounding Coon Rapids, it is actually a classic swing district within a swing county. This area has long been a bellwether, having voting for Obama in 2008 and George Bush both in 2004 and 2000.

Thus it wasn't too surprising when Republican rookie Branden Petersen upended DFL state Rep. Jerry Newton, who has run for every office this side of dog catcher in the area over the course of the past 16 years.

Petersen eked out a victory by running an excellent campaign fueled primarily by his own shoe leather and sweat equity.

Newton didn't help his own cause by getting a late start as well as casting votes in Saint Paul that were out of step with the district.

The good news for Petersen is that he earned a well deserved victory and will now have his chance to serve in the legislature.

The bad news is that this is a swing district that will require his undivided attention election after election. One false move by a legislator in this area can spell disaster.

The Dog also salutes Jerry Newton. Anyone who knows him can testify to the fact that he's truly one of the nice guys in politics.

We wish Jerry well. At age 73, is he done with campaigns?

4. Michelle Benson vs. Paul "fat chance" Meunier (Senate District 49)

This race shouldn't have been on anyone's radar but for the fact that the DFL talked a whole lot of smack about this being a potential pick up opportunity for them.

This race also attracted the Dog's attention because the DFL candidate, Paul Meunier, was a stealth candidate who did all he could to hide his true liberal leanings from the voters in Senate District 49.

Republican Michelle Benson, who defeated incumbent GOP Senator Debbie Johnson for the endorsement, went on to whip Meunier like a rented mule 60-40, proving that Meunier's "fair chance" for all campaign became a "fat chance" debacle for him personally.

What's so devastating for Meunier is that he is the sitting Mayor of Ham Lake, yet LOST EVERY PRECINCT IN THE CITY in his bid for state senate.

That's a stunning rebuke when a sitting mayor loses every precinct in his city.

One Republican state Senator who campaigned with Benson in September in Ham Lake commented to the Watchdog regarding how many Ham Lakers disliked Meunier. Meunier had been the rising star for a small group of liberal Ham Lakers who wanted to see the area become more "progressive."

Hopefully, we've seen the last of them and Paul Meunier.

Meunier also left quite a legacy on the Ham Lake city council. After Tuesday's election, all four members of the council and the mayor are rock solid conservatives (more on that below).

5. Denise Dittrich vs. Cameron Roberson (House District 47A)

DFL state Rep. Denise Dittrich barely survived election night by garnering just 50% of the vote against Cameron Roberson, the Republican endorsee who earned 49%.

Roberson ran an underdog campaign against a well-funded incumbent and nearly won. If this race is a rematch in 2012, Dittrich has to be hearing footsteps behind her. This Republican-leaning district is ripe for turnover in 2012, especially if Roberson continues to campaign this year, next year, and into 2012.

COUNTY COMMISSIONER RACES

Watchdogs continued to make progress on that most wasteful and arrogant government body known as the Anoka County Board. The election has essentially tied the board after the results last night:

District 1: Matt Look (Watchdog gain)

District 2: Andy Westerberg

District 3: Robyn West (Watchdog hold)

Dist 4: Jim Kordiak (Good Ol' Boy hold)

District 5: Carol LeDoux (Good Ol' Boy hold)

We now have a situation with 3 watchdogs (West, Look, Sivarajah) against 3 Good Ol' Boys (Earhart, Kordiak, LeDoux), with Andy Westerberg smack in the middle as the swing vote.

The Watchdog has not hesitated to voice our suspicions of Westerberg's conservative credentials, especially since the Good Ol' Boys supported him, as evidenced in part by the donation from DFL heavyweight Vance Opperman.

But it's also true that a small yet vocal group of conservatives vigorously defended Westerberg as a conservative, even more conservative than his challenger, Debbie Johnson.

Now that the election has been decided and Westerberg is the winner, the Dog is willing to give him the benefit of the doubt.

His supporters have defended him as a conservative. Okay, let's see it. As the swing vote, he will hold the power over many key votes, beginning with the vote for board chair in January.

We'll see how he votes on that issue and many others like commuter rail, lobbyist contracts, and property taxes.

Show us your conservative credentials, Commissioner Westerberg.

LOCAL RACES

Watchdogs also did well in local races.

As mentioned above, the City of Ham Lake was a total rout for conservatives. Liberal mayor Paul Meunier, who saw his political aspirations dashed in a race for state Senate, was replaced by conservative stalwart Mike Van Kirk. Van Kirk was elected along with Jim Doyle and Julie Braastad. With two other conservative council members, the city has a unanimous watchdog council.

Freedom loving citizens will find a home in Ham Lake.

In Columbia Heights, we were pleased to see Donna Schmitt win a city council seat. Donna has been a staunch watchdog for taxpayers in that city and she will do great things on the council.

In Saint Francis, we have to smile when we see that LeRoy Schaffer was re-elected to the city council at the top vote getter.

While we don't condone his sometimes unorthodox methods, we do admire his willingness to take on the status quo and act as a general thorn in the side of bureaucrats.

It was a great night watchdogs!

E-mail Update 11/15/10

In This Issue:

1. Election Night Loser Volume I.
2. Election Night Loser Volume II.
3. Unhappy Birthday for Northstar Rail.
4. Northstar Phase II is Dead!

ELECTION NIGHT LOSER VOLUME I

And it all crashes down

And you break your crown

And you point the finger but there's no one around

Just want one thing, just to play the king

But the castle's crumbled and your left with just a name

Where's your crown, King Nothing?

- James Hetfield

As we mentioned in our election post-mortem, the political world in Minnesota was turned upside down by angry voters, creating a bevy of winners and losers.

The same can be said for Anoka County, home for many decades to the Good Ol' Boys who have lately attempted to rebrand themselves as "progressives," as if that moniker held any cache with the liberty-loving denizens of Oak Grove, Columbia Heights, Linwood, and all points in between.

Regardless of what they call themselves, the Good Ol' Boys took a beating on election night, making the biggest election night loser a man who wasn't even on the ballot. That man being none other than Good Ol' Boy Godfather Dan Erhart.

The Watchdog makes no effort to conceal our relief over Erhart's marginalization and isolation after this historic election.

It was indeed a bad night for the Godfather.

First, he watched as the County's pork barrel sugar daddy, Jim Oberstar went to down to a stunning defeat in the Eighth Congressional District.

As Chairman of the House Transportation Committee and an unapologetic purveyor of budget busting pork, Oberstar was Batman to Erhart's Robin.

Oberstar was the pipeline to Washington dollars for many goofy, money wasting transportation projects in the county, including Northstar rail and the Duluth tourist train.

But the real bonus with Oberstar at the helm was that the Chairman could almost guarantee that projects would make it through the process either the legitimate way or via ear marking.

No more.

There is no way to overstate how historic it was for Watchdogs in this county to see Oberstar gone. Without him turning on the spigot, there is no money to grease the skids for these mega projects.

Oh, by the way, Erhart's need for junkets to DC should be gone as well.

On a side note, we should also point out that Good Ol' Boy lobbyist Elwyn Tinklenberg took a hit on election night when Oberstar went down. What a shame.

Commissioner Erhart also has problems on the county board as well. The monolithic tax and spend county board he knew for so many years has changed, leaving him isolated and bereft of any real influence.

While time will reveal the factions and ad hoc coalitions on the new Board, it looks like there are three distinct factions. One consists of fiscally conservative champions of accountable government led by Rhonda Sivarajah along with the newly re-elected Robyn West and newcomer Matt Look.

A second faction is a bit more moderate and is a swing group made up of rookies Carol LeDoux and Andy Westerberg. Both have some pro-business credentials but both have also supported big government projects. It will be interesting to see where these two land on various issues. But most importantly, neither is a member of the Cult of Erhart Personality like Dennis Berg and Margaret Langfeld.

That leaves just Erhart and Jim Kordiak as the tattered remnants of the Good Ol' Boys network.

Much like communism, we can relegate Erhart's Reign of Taxpayer Abuse to the dustbin of history.

His influence is now more in the nature of a historical footnote, like when Portugal was a naval power or when Mesopotamia mattered.

The Watchdog hereby strips Erhart of the title "Godfather."

Will 2012 spell the end of Erhart's political career?

ELECTION NIGHT LOSER VOLUME II

Speaking of Anoka County, their employee lobbying team is plain out of luck after this election.

The tandem of Steve Novak and Kathy Tingelstad bet on the wrong horses and now have about as much influence at the legislature as the mock United Nations team from Anoka High.

A former DFL state senator, Novak's center of influence was the DFL majority in that body. With a strong Republican majority, Novak is at best unknown and at worst known as a former DFL senator from the Bad Old Days.

With the exception of Senator Mike Jungbauer of East Bethel, there probably isn't a single Republican senator who could pick Novak out of a crowd of money chasing lobbyists.

Things are even worse for Kathy Tingelstad, the former GOP state Representative who overrode Pawlenty on his veto of a the transportation tax increase, chief authored Northstar rail, and was a nominal Republican at best.

The Watchdog has written extensively of Tingelstad's persona non grata status among Republican legislators who remember her petulant, sometimes traitorous behavior.

If that wasn't enough, she doubled down on her RINOism by supporting Tom Horner for governor.

Republicans now have a majority in both the House and Senate and they remember her behavior all too well.

She won't find many doors open to her in the upcoming legislative session.

Great. Anoka County will have well over \$200,000 in salary committed to two employees who have no influence with those in charge in Saint Paul.

Since we're cutting budgets, this would be a great place to start.

And while they're at it, it's high time to drop the hiring of outside lobbyists as well.

There are seven lobbyists on staff already at the county. They're called county commissioners and they all know where the Capitol is located.

UNHAPPY BIRTHDAY FOR NORTHSTAR RAIL

The Northstar commuter rail line saw its first anniversary of operation this past week and it's turned out to be one ugly baby.

We hate to say we told you so, but we told you so.

All the promises of economic development, job creation, and the "one and one-half lanes" the rail line would virtually add to Highway 10 haven't come to fruition.

The economy along the line is in the tank along with the rest of the state's economy, jobs are scarce, and ridership numbers are well below their projections.

The spinmeisters have been claiming that ridership numbers are only 5% below projections. But with riders to the Twins games dropped out, ridership projections are looking to be a whopping 20% below projections!

The spinmeisters go on to claim that ridership projections haven't been met because the economy has slowed, gas prices are down, and driving is "more attractive" because of improvements to Highway 10.

So, in other words they're saying ridership projections were originally based on the economy never slowing, gas prices never falling, and Highway 10 never seeing improvements?

These planners must be the same people who issued all those sub-prime mortgages, assuming real estate prices would never fall and housing would always rise in value.

Backers of Northstar continue to offer ripped off taxpayers more BS and spin. Felix Schmeising, a Sherburne County Commissioner and Northstar backer, blew sunshine up everyone's backside by observing, "We have always considered commuter rail a long-term investment meant to attract jobs and complement our region's quality of life."

BS, Felix. You pitched the train as a solution to Highway 10 congestion. Advocates claimed that "study after study" showed that a commuter train was wanted by the taxpayers and the BEST solution to Highway 10 congestion.

The final insult came when Metro Transit boasted that the rail line is still within budget. Yeah, I guess you could say that Government Motors is within budget or that AIG is within budget.

Whenever you can get the taxpayers to hand you massive subsidies, you can always be "within budget."

Dan Erhart, the prime mover behind this whole debacle, should be held to account for this white elephant. He led us down this \$320 million rat hole and has been suspiciously absent from the media scrutiny.

Funny, when it was time to cut the ribbons and buy the locomotives, he was a total media sponge, sucking up adulation for his "visionary leadership" in championing 19th Century transportation solutions to the Highway 10 corridor.

What's next? A reintroduction of stage coaches? Maybe time for a junket to Petticoat Junction to check out the latest and greatest in horses and steam locomotives.

NORTHSTAR PHASE II IS DEAD!

As mentioned above, the political demise of Jim Oberstar means that the pork barrel spigot has been turned off on a number of projects, including the Northstar rail "phase II" extension to Saint Cloud.

The project has been officially shelved with Oberstar on his way out because it never could meet the Federal Transit Administration's cost-benefit analysis, which is why the Big Lake to Saint Cloud route was dropped in phase I.

The only reason that it was kept alive is that Democrats sought to get it funded anyway, bypassing the objective cost-benefit analysis by earmarking the project instead.

Hopefully we've seen the last of these wasteful rail projects, including the Duluth tourist train.

E-mail Update 11/22/10

In This Issue:

EDITOR'S NOTE: Harold Hamilton and the entire Watchdog staff send condolences to Jolynn "Joey" Erikson and family. Joey lost her husband this past week in a car accident. Joey is a pillar of the community and a wonderful friend to all. We offer our support to her and the entire Erikson family during this difficult time.

1. Madam Chairwoman!
2. Lame Duck Shenanigans.
3. Jungbauer Passed Over.
4. Feelin' Groovy in SLP.

MADAM CHAIRWOMAN!

The news just keeps getting better for Watchdogs here in Anoka County. As last week's issue noted, the Anoka County Board took a welcome and decidedly conservative turn on election day.

That turn of events is already paying dividends. Commissioner Rhonda Sivarajah announced last Wednesday that she has secured the commitment of a majority of the incoming board to make her the next Board Chairwoman!

This historic and exciting news means that conservatives will set the agenda on the county board when our Iron Lady takes the gavel early next year. The vote stands as a repudiation of the Good Ol' Boy "Progressives" and signals a new era in county government.

It was just a few short years ago that Rhonda was the only conservative on the board, frequently the only "no" vote on many 6-1 board votes. Many of the "progressives" snickered behind her back and dismissed her brand of fiscal accountability and limited government.

Progress was made in 2006 when Robyn West was election to the board, giving conservatives a beachhead on the Board and two votes in favor of good government.

On election night, Matt Look took over district 1 from the Good Ol' Boys.

Over in District 2, former GOP state Representative Andy Westerberg won the open seat vacated by Dick Lang.

These four have secured the chair for Sivarajah. It's been a long journey for the Iron Lady and her supporters as she has gone from a lonely (albeit correct) voice in the wilderness to the most powerful woman in Anoka County politics.

Having said all this, Sivarajah will have to watch her back. There are still powerful Good Ol' Boy sympathizers roaming the halls of county government. These folks will be looking to undermine her authority and limit her success as the county board heads into a pivotal election in 2012 after redistricting. These folks would love to deliver a one-two knockout punch by first making her unsuccessful as board chair and then taking her out in 2012.

The good news is that Rhonda Sivarajah is a smart, savvy, tough leader who has her own army of supporters both inside and outside county government.

We've been there for her from the start and we'll be there to stand with her going forward.

Congratulations, Rhonda!

LAME DUCK SHENNANIGANS

It's about time something is done regarding lame duck politicians, especially when the incumbent body is so thoroughly rebuked as Congress was on election night.

The national media is abuzz with stories of what the lame duck Democrats are considering, including potentially allowing gays to serve openly in the military, education benefits to illegal aliens, and a vote on a new strategic arms treaty.

This Congress has no moral authority to pass legislation that the new Congress would unlikely pass. The long interlude between the election and the next Congress is an anachronism of the days when it took many weeks to get to Washington by stage coach or hot air balloon.

These kind of lame duck stunts undermine the integrity of our democratic institutions and further shake taxpayer confidence in Congress and the President.

But Washington isn't the only place where these machinations are happening. Watchdog sources are reporting lame duck doings down at the Anoka County courthouse, involving our own Dan "not the Godfather anymore" Erhart.

These sources report that Erhart is working to renew the County's current contracts with DFL-dominated lobbying firms before the new county board can be seated in January. Erhart chairs the committee that has jurisdiction over these contracts.

If true, this maneuver should be swatted down by the other commissioners. The new board should be free to select the lobbying structure and team it wants, which is hopefully none. If this alleged contract renewal scheme is true, this is precisely the kind of game playing that voters rejected two weeks ago.

Moreover, the Board, if it goes that direction, would likely be interested in a team that has some modicum of credibility with the new GOP majorities. This is especially critical

since the employee lobbying tandem of Steve Novak and Kathy Tingelstad have no influence with these new majorities whatsoever.

JUNGBAUER PASSED OVER

The newly minted state Senate GOP majority named committee chairs this week, causing some eyebrows to be raised among Capitol observers.

Perhaps the most controversial aspect of the process was the rejection of state Senator Mike Jungbauer of East Bethel as Transportation Committee chairman.

He was passed over for the less senior Joe Gimse of Willmar.

Jungbauer publically speculated last week that he would be passed over for cooperating with the DFL regarding the I-35W bridge collapse.

The Senate Republican Caucus rejected the charge, simply noting that committee gavels aren't awarded on seniority alone.

While Jungbauer would have made a fine committee chairman, he did support Northstar commuter rail and its expansion, something Gimse likely will not.

FEELIN' GROOVY IN SLP

The facts demonstrate the while American school kids are way behind their counter parts in other developed nations with respect to math and science, they are way ahead in the self-esteem department.

Who needs solid math and science skills in a hyper-competitive global economy? At least your kid can be okay with himself when his job is snatched away by some hungry Chinese or Indian accountant, engineer, or chemist.

Early this month, ninth graders at Spring Lake Park High School took a day off from their math and science studies to spend the day at a "Respect Retreat."

The goal, apparently, is to make everyone feel good about themselves and create a positive vibe at the school where peace will guide the planets and love will steer the stars.

"Imagine if every student showed respect. Imagine what a great environment that would make," said Matt Meier, a "Panther mentor advisor."

Yeah, imagine if every kid passed his standardized test for math and reading. Imagine what a great economy that would make.

We're told the day begins with a game of "clumps" where students rush to link arms. Panther mentor Meier excitedly noted that this is the place where "a jock might grab a choir member." Groovy, man.

There were also games to encourage "inclusion" and group singing of such classics as "Lean on Me." They also "dialogued" with each other.

Still no word on whether the moon was in the seventh house or whether Jupiter was aligned with Mars during this tribute to love and respect.

The day concluded with a large group circle in a darkened gym enveloped by "mellow music" illuminated only by a "flame of hope" candle. Students took turns with a microphone regurgitating psycho-babble and hugging each other.

The Watchdog wonders when the district will be holding a math and science retreat to focus on dismal test scores and the country's rapidly eroding technological edge.

E-mail Update 11/29/10

In This Issue:

1. Proposed 2011 Property Taxes.
2. More Lame Duck Skullduggery.
3. Another School "Wellness" Program.

PROPOSED 2011 PROPERTY TAXES

It's the Holiday season, but government shows no mercy. In fact, it's probably appropriate that 2011 proposed property taxes arrived on kitchen tables about the same time turkeys arrived on those same tables.

Note that this is a proposed 2011 property tax statement. The local units of government responsible for setting these taxes will be holding public meetings throughout December to receive public input before they certify the levies in late December.

At the outset, make sure you attend these meetings and have your voice heard regarding these taxes, which are proposed to be increased in many instances despite the fact that property values are falling and President Obama's much ballyhooed stimulus spending has failed to stimulate anything more than the salaries and benefits of federal bureaucrats, leaving many property tax owners out of work or struggling with stagnant wages.

Let's take a closer look at the proposed property taxes of one Watchdog who owns a single family home in Anoka County.

Home value: The taxable market value of the home for 2011 fell by 10% from its 2010 taxable market value.

General County Levy: Anoka County's general levy on this home rose slightly by about 1.5%.

Regional Rail Authority: In one of the most outrageous tax increases we've seen in some time, this tax levy is proposed to rise by a whopping 50%! This despite the economy and the fact that Northstar rail has been a demonstrable failure. Moreover, with Jim Oberstar leaving Congress, hopes for an expansion of Northstar or the Duluth tourist train are all but dead. Anoka County taxpayers should be outraged by the eye-popping tax increase proposed here.

County Public Safety Radio System: A slight decrease was seen here of about 2%.

City Government: The city where this homeowner lives dropped its proposed 2011 tax levy from the 2010 levy by a healthy 5.5% margin.

Anoka-Hennepin School District: Voter approved levies fell by over 10%, another bit of good news.

Anoka-Hennepin School District: Unfortunately, other local levies, meaning the kind that voters don't have to approve, are proposed to rise by about 10%.

Metropolitan Special Taxing Districts: This levy is proposed to fall slightly.

Other Special Taxing Districts: Here's another outrageous one that rose by about 40%. These districts include, for example, housing and redevelopment authority levies and water management districts.

Overall, the net proposed property tax for 2011 is 2% below the 2010 actual levy. While property taxes can be complicated, and while a decrease is good, some of these massive proposed increases are out of line, especially in this economy. It doesn't surprise the Watchdog one bit that the biggest proposed percentage increase came from regional rail, a budget area chaired by Good Ol' Boy Dan Erhart.

As mentioned in a previous edition, his reign of taxpayer abuse is about to end. It's unlikely that Chairwoman Rhonda Sivarajah will appoint Erhart to chair any committees or participate in any governmental organizations like the Northstar Corridor Development Authority, that deal with transportation. We have every confidence that she will appoint a commissioner with a reasonable view of transportation and taxes that is more in line with what taxpayers expect from county government.

But more importantly, it's vital that Watchdogs attend these budget and tax hearings to let your elected officials know that you're keeping them accountable. Remember these are proposed property taxes at this point.

Check the web site of each jurisdiction to see when and where you can weigh in. The message that was sent on election day needs to be reinforced. If you voted for lower taxes and smaller government on November 2nd, you have an obligation to speak out yet again.

For Anoka County:
December 2nd, 6:00 PM
County Board Room

For Metropolitan Taxing Districts:
Met Council Chambers
390 Robert Street in Saint Paul
December 8th, 6:00 PM

Again, for school districts and your city, visit their web sites.

You shouldn't feel intimidated about the complexity of property taxes. First, they really aren't all that complex. Second, there are resources to help you understand the system, listed below. Third, all taxes are ultimately underpinned by a philosophy about government. If you have strong principles about taxing and spending, it's your right and obligation as a citizen to make sure your elected officials know where you stand. Stand up for your beliefs!

Anoka County Property Tax Office

Minnesota Taxpayer's Association

If you take just a few minutes to review the information offered on these two web sites, you will be armed with all you need to know to intelligently speak to and understand property taxes in Minnesota. Heck, if you review these materials, you will know more about Minnesota's property tax system than 95% of public.

MORE LAME DUCK SKULLDUGGERY

The Watchdog last week called out lame duck politicians at the federal and county level who are seeking to cram through the system unpopular initiatives that were repudiated by the voters on election night. We highlighted the immoral and destructive nature of these stunts that threaten the integrity of our democratic institutions.

It looks like county and federal politicians aren't the only ones engaging in this garbage.

The Star Tribune reported this week that the East Bethel City Council is cramming through a water and waste treatment system even though it was a central issue in the city council election and the voters ousted council members who favored the system.

Moreover, the lame duck city council is proceeding despite a lawsuit that has been filed as well.

This past week, the city council ignored the will of the people and voted to issue nearly \$19 million bonds to finance the project.

The lawsuit contends that the council failed to take into account demographic projections before issuing the bonds. The demographic projections are important because they are an important metric in determining if enough users of the water system will come on line to fairly distribute the repayment burden.

And surprise, surprise. The demographic projections show that expected user growth is just half of what would be needed for the city to break even on the project. But the more important point has nothing to do with bonds, repayment schedules, and other financial minutia.

Regardless of the public policy merits, the citizens of East Bethel spoke loudly on election night by ousting city council members supportive of the project. In other words, a referendum on the water and waste treatment system was held and the proposed system was soundly rejected.

For the lame duck supporters to press on in favor of this project despite the crystal clear verdict of the voters is a slap in the face to entire city and a bush league move with absolutely no moral basis whatsoever.

Goodness, these lame duck machinations have reached epidemic proportions. It bespeaks a pernicious arrogance and elitism that is the antithesis of our democratic process.

It appears that the same arrogance that led to so many politicians being fired on election night is continuing to inspire them to ignore the will of the people as they finish their sorry terms in office.

Again, it's high time to put severe limits on what kind of business may be conducted during lame duck sessions of government. Let's start with no city council meetings in November and December. It's not like the world will end if the East Bethel council can't meet for two months.

ANOTHER SCHOOL "WELLNESS" PROGRAM

Well, we know why math and science scores aren't what they should be. It appears our school officials are focused on social engineering instead, attempting make sure our kids are filled with self-esteem, especially the kind that comes from having low cholesterol and the proper body mass index.

Last week, we exposed the Spring Lake Park School District's "Respect Retreat." This week, we uncover Anoka-Hennepin's "wellness" program.

The article in the Anoka County Union tells us that the district screens students for high cholesterol, high blood pressure, and unhealthy "body mass index," which means you're fat. Really fat.

Students with high risk factors and their parents are then browbeaten about healthy choices and the virtue of clean living, free from the bonds of cheeseburgers, pizza, Twinkies, and the siren song of all things chocolate.

Yes, living a clean life is a good thing. We all remember Dean Wormer's admonition about going through life fat, drunk and stupid.

But this is not a proper function of our schools and is one of the reasons core subjects like math, science and English aren't going so well.

These feel good, Big Brother activities take precious time out of an already short school year.

Let mom and dad handle the Big Macs, Anoka Hennepin. You're doing a bad enough job teaching the basics that you shouldn't be taking on other functions, especially those best handled by parents.

E-mail Update 12/6/10

In This Issue:

1. What?! Northstar Rail a Bust?
2. Anoka-Hennepin Schools Sound the Alarm - for 2013!
3. Football Follies Fall Flat For Focused Followers of Fiscal Fiasco.
4. Tingelstad and Marge Kelliher.

WHAT?! NORTHSTAR RAIL A BUST?

Yeah, knock the Watchdog over with a feather. Northstar commuter rail, the money-eating mega-project the Good Ol' Boys swore would deliver Anoka County to the land of Milk and Honey has turned out to be what we thought it would be.

Yep, your fearless Watchdog leader Harold Hamilton saw this boondoggle for what it was and made the prescient call that the numbers supporting the project were so much BS and would never deliver.

It only took one year of operation to prove the Watchdog correct and the Good Ol' Boys wrong.

Just a couple of weeks ago, this publication pointed out that the ridership numbers were worse than what was initially reported because the numbers reflected many thousands of folks heading to Target Field by taking a taxpayer-subsidized train ride to a taxpayer-subsidized baseball stadium. Subsidizing some else's leisure activity is a core function of government, right?

We showed that when baseball fans are backed out, the number of commuters riding the train is much worse than what we were promised.

And now the Star Tribune has finally caught up.

It has finally been reported that ridership numbers on Northstar are now a full 20% below forecast. 20%!

Of course, there are all sorts of excuses for this massive forecasting error and no accountability.

It's the economy's fault. It's the price of gasoline. It's the fault of the big bad parking lot owners in Minneapolis who reduced their fees. It's improvements on Highway 10. It's the fact that Northstar is new and needs time to sell.

Gee, the Watchdog remembers when Dan Erhart and crew were telling us that "the studies" all showed that the public was well aware of Northstar and eager to ride it. Commuters were fed up with being prisoners in their cars and were just champing at the bit for an alternative.

We remember the condescending tone of Erhart and others who belittled Northstar skeptics by adopting the slogan "It just makes sense."

So where are the riders, Commissioner Erhart?

The simple fact is that the number of promised riders was a dubious claim from the very start.

It's also somewhat humorous and alarming to observe that the liberal progressive Northstar apologists are using the typical liberal excuses for failed government programs. Namely, the program is failing because there isn't enough of it.

If only Northstar would go to Saint Cloud, then all would be well. If only Northstar were linked to a train to Duluth, it would all be okay. If only we outlawed cars and mandated everyone to ride the train in the same way Obama has mandated that we all buy health insurance.

Yeah, if we only ran the train another 40 miles up to a city smaller than Coon Rapids it would all be fine. Maybe we could put in some stops in other happening metropolises like Clearwater and Becker to really make the project take off.

And where's the accountability for this fiasco? In the real world, most of us would be fired for being off by 20% on our projections. Who will be held accountable and made to suffer the consequences for this failure?

Unfortunately, this is government and the only ones likely to pay the price will be the taxpayers of this county who will for decades to come pay higher property taxes to subsidize Erhart's Folly.

The one place where the citizens of this good county can hold those responsible accountable is at the polls in 2012, when Dan Erhart will be up for re-election.

Until then, we can take comfort in the fact that incoming Board Chairwoman Rhonda Sivarajah will no doubt make sure Erhart is kept away from rail and transit leadership positions so he can do no more harm.

We have all been made to pay a fearsome price for his legacy project. And what a sad, lengthy, expensive legacy that will be.

ANOKA-HENNEPIN SCHOOLS SOUND THE ALARM - FOR 2013!

Quick, everyone panic. The Anoka-Hennepin School District is claiming they may be facing money problems as soon as the 2013-2014 school year.

The Watchdog doesn't know which is the bigger buffoonery here, the fact that this school district is predictably claiming financial problems or the fact that the Star Tribune thinks this story amount to news fit to print.

The Star Tribune ought to be embarrassed that they spilled ink reporting that Anoka-Hennepin MAY be facing money problems three years down the road.

Why is this news? Why should we care? A potential fiscal crisis three years down the road isn't news. Moreover, when doesn't this school district claim money problems and threaten taxpayers with "painful" cuts at every turn?

When was the last time the district claimed it had enough money to produce the mediocre results they give us?

Here's a predication from the Watchdog: Anoka-Hennepin schools will claim they have a money problem in the following years: 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024, 2025, 2026, 2027, 2028, 2029, 2030, 2031, 2032, 2033, 2034, 2035, 2036, 2037, 2038, 2039, 2040, 2041, 2042, 2043, 2044, 2045, 2046, 2047, 2048, 2049, and 2050.

After that, it's unclear but the school board projects money problems starting in 2051 and very painful cuts if levy tax increases aren't passed.

And here's a news bulletin for the Star Tribune and the Anoka-Hennepin School Board. Property tax payers are having a money problem of their own RIGHT NOW. They can't afford more tax increases, especially when the school district doesn't offer increased results with increased money.

Moreover, the district ought to demonstrate what it is doing to bring costs under control. Like every other government organization, this school district faces massive pension obligations and rising health care costs. What is the district doing about gold plated benefits like defined-benefit pensions for people who are under 60 and enjoy pensions for decades after they leave government? What are they doing about health care costs? When was the last time teachers in the district had their pay frozen?

This school board has been simply going along with the prevailing tide for far too long. Until the Watchdog sees educational reforms coupled with compensation reforms, we will oppose all levy increases and work hard to defeat them.

This country can no longer afford crappy results, kids unprepared for the global economy, and rising employee costs. This school board has managed to get by over the years by papering over these problems simply by spending more money.

Those days are over. The money is gone and the rest of the world is eating our lunch while we hold "Respect Retreats" and do whatever it takes to meet outrageous and

unsustainable teacher union demands for ever more pay and benefits without a corresponding demand for accountability for results.

Paging Michelle Rhee. Paging Michelle Rhee...

FOOTBALL FOLLIES FALL FLAT FOR FOCUSED FOLLOWERS OF FISCAL FIASCO.
We read with mild amusement the Star Tribune story offering a rather implausible and even preposterous scenario for a Vikings' football stadium.

According to the story, the Vikings are considering building a new stadium in Ramsey County on the site of the old Twin Cities Army Ammunition Plant (TCAAP). The deal would apparently be locally financed, with Anoka and Washington counties chipping in dollars.

Before Watchdogs get uptight about this story, let's see it for what it is, which is nothing more than a public relations stunt to keep the stadium debate alive in the media and among the general public while attempting to put pressure on Hennepin County and Minneapolis, the only jurisdictions that can realistically offer a tax base capable of handling the project.

Think about it. In Anoka County, the story quotes Dennis Berg and Steve Novak. Berg is on his way out the door to retirement and Novak's future is clouded by an incoming county board that may not see the value in paying a former DFL state Senator more money than the governor makes.

It is doubtful the incoming Anoka County Board would pony up county tax dollars for a new stadium under any circumstances, much less for a stadium in another county.

Funny, we didn't see a quote from our incoming Board Chairwoman, Rhonda Sivarajah.

And over in Washington County, Watchdogs are fully in control of the county board and highly unlikely to support this kind of bunk. Even Commissioner Dennis Hegberg confessed that the talks regarding this plan failed to produce a viable financing plan.

Washington County taxpayers have a true friend in Commissioner Bill Pulkrabek. When we hear Commissioner Pulkrabek say nice things about the Vikings and their stadium plans, then we'll worry for our friends in that county.

In short, this is yet another ham handed fool's errand run by lobbyist Lester Bagley, who has been a spectacular failure as a stadium pitchman for the past five years.

This story tells the Watchdog that the Vikings still have no stadium site, no local partner, no viable financing plan and no legislative champions.

In that respect, this was the feel good football story of the week.

TINGELSTAD AND MARGE KELLIHER.

This past weekend, former GOP office holders were punished by the Party for formally supporting and endorsing Tom Horner for governor. (Be sure to visit the Minnesota Watchdog for a thorough analysis of this issue.)

While the Watchdog has no problem sending a message to these current and future Quislings, we can't help but wonder how the Party missed the gubernatorial misdeeds of former GOP state Representative Kathy "Override Six" Tingelstad.

If endorsing Horner can get you suspended from Party activities for two years, we wonder what the punishment is for supporting DFLer Margaret Anderson Kelliher?

E-mail Update 12/13/10

In This Issue:

Editor's Note: Congratulations to state Senator-Elect Michelle Benson, who recently announced that she and her husband are expecting a child. Apparently, defeating an incumbent for the GOP endorsement, thrashing her opponent in the general election and taking office as part of an unprecedented GOP majority in the state Senate just aren't enough for this superwoman.

Congratulations, Michelle and family!

1. Anoka County Has a List for Santa.
2. Tourist Train Update.
3. Regional Rail Authority Fuzzy Math.
4. Student Test Scores Dismal - Again.

ANOKA COUNTY HAS A LIST FOR SANTA

'Tis the Christmas season, a time when boys and girls put pen to paper and dream up a wish list for Santa chock full of requests for shiny new toys and gizmos.

And just like those kids making lists, the Anoka County commissioners have made their own wish list in the form of the county's 2011 legislative agenda for the upcoming session at the Capitol beginning in January.

As in years past, the legislative agenda is about as realistic as Johnny wishing for that rocket ride to Mars or Susie's hope that Santa will bring Miley Cyrus over for a play date.

For example:

- No cuts in state aid to the county. Good luck with that one. The state faces a \$6 billion deficit (thanks to a projected spending increase of 27%) and aid cuts will happen. Moreover, why does the county think it's so special that it doesn't have to share in the spending reductions necessary to balance the budget?
- State bonding dollars to repair the Coon Rapids dam so the rich folks who have riverside property above the dam can continue to enjoy their estates. Remember that the Department of Natural Resources has already noted that removing the dam would be the ecologically sound decision.
- And the use of bonding dollars? Bonding dollars are debt, something the state and country don't need more of. 2011 is not a bonding year anyway, with even-numbered years reserved for bonding bills. In addition, the state has spent billions on bonding bills in the past few years, with no "stimulus" effect noted, just like the debt Washington has been utilizing to keep unemployment below 8% (remember that promise?).

- \$400,000 for a fishing pier at a county park. Did anyone down at the courthouse get the memo regarding the whole economy thing?
- \$275,000 to redevelop the "Heritage Lab" at the Wargo Nature Center. Sounds like a great candidate for private donations and funding.
- State funding for library accessibility, reducing the pressure on local taxpayers. Again, anyone down at the courthouse see that news story about the state having no money?
- There was also a curious statement in the legislative agenda about collaborating with the legislature regarding solutions to various issues. Normally, the Watchdog could applaud feel-good platitudes like this but the statement has just a bit of irony.

Anoka County rightly enjoys a horrible reputation at the Capitol, especially among Republican legislators. Years of Dan Erhart's arrogant and aggressive tactics have alienated key GOP legislators. Moreover, the county has for years employed partisan DFL lobbyists who have used heavy-handed tactics against Republicans.

A new board will be installed in January that has an opportunity to mend fences at the Capitol with the new majority. The new board also has an opportunity to assemble an advocacy team with credibility, contrary to Erhart's last tyrannical gasps before he assumes the mantle of irrelevancy.

TOURIST TRAIN UPDATE

The Duluth Tourist Train was also on the agenda for the legislative agenda but the Watchdog decided to report on this item separately because the county board considered it as a separate agenda item.

Commissioners Rhonda Sivarajah and Robyn West both moved to have the request for \$5 million in debt-financed state bonds voted on separately for inclusion in the legislative agenda.

The motion to include the bonding dollars passed 5-2 (West and Sivarajah voting against), as expected, with the usual suspects and Scott's Wife voting in favor as she began what promises to be an ignoble tenure on the county board.

What did we just say about the county needing credibility down at the Capitol? Now they will be coming to the legislature in January, while the state is still mired in economic turmoil, asking for money for a passenger train to Duluth.

The Watchdog has on many occasions explained why a passenger rail to Duluth won't work. Heck, even Amtrak abandoned the line back in the 1980s.

Moreover, how has that whole Northstar rail thing been working out? The failure of Northstar to garner the promised ridership will be the first piece of evidence majority Republicans will consult before issuing \$5 million in debt for yet another 19th Century people mover.

The commissioners were told by Jon Olson, the county's public services director, that the line would cost between \$550 and \$750 million. But don't worry, the cash-flush federal government would pay 80% of the cost.

Whew. For a minute we thought we would have to pick up the entire tab. Wait till those suckers who pay federal taxes find out they're on the hook for 80%! Wait a minute...

And don't forget about the true cost of Northstar rail. Once upon a time, Dan Erhart promised the train would go to Saint Cloud and cost \$165 million. The line only goes to Big Lake, cost \$320 million and has failed to meet ridership projections.

For a refresher regarding the Tourist Train, check out an Op Ed by Commissioner Rhonda Sivarajah.

REGIONAL RAIL AUTHORITY FUZZY MATH

So we were supposed to be impressed, thrilled, and grateful this week when the Anoka County Regional Rail Authority (ACRRA) took mercy on downtrodden taxpayers and cut their proposed tax levy for 2011.

Readers will recall a recent edition of this publication that examined Anoka County's proposed property tax levies, including the over-sized increase proposed by the Regional Rail Authority.

For 2011, the proposed levy had been for \$6.4 million, compared \$4.4 million for 2010. For 2011, the certified levy was pared down to \$4.2 million, a 3.5 % decrease from the 2010 certified levy.

Yeah, the \$2.2 million decrease is great and all, but where is the remaining \$4.2 million going?

The Northstar rail expansion to Saint Cloud has been shelved. The tourist train to Duluth looks to be a goner with Jim Oberstar being forced into retirement at age 76. And remember that another pot of money pays for the massive operating subsidies required of Northstar commuter rail.

So how does the ACRRA intend to dispose of \$4.2 million of our money?

An article in the Anoka County Union tells us \$100,000 will be spent in pursuit of a Northstar rail stop in Ramsey.

Another \$250,000 will be spent on some more studies comparing commuter rail to bus rapid transit for Highway 65.

So what about the other \$3.85 million?

That sucking sound you hear is the black hole of lobbyists and other Dan Erhart cronies getting a piece of the ACRRRA action, among other dubious expenditures.

Your tax dollars at work.

STUDENT TEST SCORES DISMAL - AGAIN

This publication commented last week upon a news article featuring yet another dire warning from the Anoka-Hennepin school district about the need for more funding to "maintain the excellence."

How timely that this week a very respected student testing consortium reported international test scores for math, science and reading.

The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) tests 15 year-old students in 65 developed countries in these three core learning areas.

In the most recent assessment period, students from the United States placed a dismal 32nd in math, well below the test score average.

In science, we came in 23rd, behind such superpowers as Slovenia and Estonia. In this subject area, American kids scored just above the average.

Reading was somewhat better with the U.S. placing 17th.

In total, the test scores are abysmal and speak volumes about the state of education in our country. It's high time to wrest our education system out of the hands of the teacher unions and get serious about reforms.

If you fear for the future of America and our superpower status, take a close look at the test scores and see where the Chinese finished (hint: right at the top in all three subject areas).

None other than Obama Education Secretary Arne Duncan said of the test results, "The United States came in 23rd or 24th in most subjects. We can quibble, or we can face the brutal truth that we're being out-educated."

When the Anoka-Hennepin school district comes begging for money and making veiled threats if they don't get their loot, ask them how the increased spending is going to address the problem of our kids getting out-educated by most of our competitors. How will the money improve math and science learning?

Coming in 23rd or 24th isn't what any reasonable person would call "excellence."

E-mail Update 12/20/10

In This Issue:

EDITOR'S NOTE: MERRY CHRISTMAS FROM THE ANOKA COUNTY WATCHDOG!

In This Issue:

1. The Old DFL Soft Shoe.
2. The Anoka-Hennepin Santa List.
3. Those Over-Worked, Under-Paid State Employees.

THE OLD DFL SOFT SHOE

Well, that didn't take long. Just a scant few weeks after taking a butt whipping of epic proportions, Anoka County's resident DFL apratchik has reappeared in the pages of the local rag to pass judgment on internal Republican matters.

Mel Aanerud, who used to fail to sign letters as a local DFL official, has resurfaced with another vapid, meaningless letter to the editor parroting the annoying braying of other DFL politicians who are horrified that the Republican Party finally took a stand regarding folks like Arne Carlson who turned their back on the Party many years ago.

Old Mel's letter was really nothing more than a sophomoric effort to take a shot at the party that carried Anoka County by a mile on election night as well as appeal to Independent voters who realized that backing the Democrats was a huge mistake in 2008.

On election night, Independents voted for the GOP candidate for Congress over the Democrat candidate by a whopping 56-38% margin. That's a 36 point reversal from the last mid-term election in 2006.

Those numbers were driven in large part by some big time buyer's remorse among Independents who felt duped by Barack Obama's promise to govern as a "post-partisan" moderate. Instead, they were horrified by Obama's record deficits, record government debt, "stimulus" programs, Wall Street bailouts, inept foreign policy, Obamacare, and an arrogant, elitist attitude towards both Republicans and the people he was charged to govern.

Moreover, DFLers who shriek in feigned outrage over Republicans "punishing" members of their own party for failing to toe the line either have a short memory or are showing just a bit too much hypocrisy.

The Watchdog remembers Saint Paul Mayor Norm Coleman being booed off the stage by DFL activists merely because Coleman believed in the intrinsic value of life.

We remember when Tim Penny left the DFL because he felt pro-life centrists were shunned.

And just this year, we saw veteran state Representative Gene Pelowski, a well-respected moderate, challenged for the DFL endorsement for failing to toe the DFL Party line on tax increases.

Big Labor, a key DFL constituency, led the charge, noting that Rep. Pelowski, "ignored calls to raise revenue," meaning he committed the cardinal sin of voting against tax increases.

Yeah, that's some big tent you've got there, Mr. Aanerud.

The Anoka County Watchdog has a few topical suggestions for upcoming letters from this prolific purveyor of putrid partisan prose:

- How the Senate District 49 DFL managed to lose the state Senate seat in that district, given how they bragged of the quality of their candidate, Ham Lake Mayor Paul Meunier. Better yet, explain how Meunier lost every precinct in the city of which he is mayor.
- How the Senate District 49 DFL managed to lose the House District 49B seat, especially given how much DFLers have blasted the supposed lack of qualifications of Branden Petersen, who is now known as "Representative Petersen" to Mr. Aanerud.
- How the Anoka County DFL lost the state Senate seats of Don Betzold, Leo Foley, and Rick Olseen.
- Perhaps we can learn how Michele Bachmann, the devil incarnate to hear DFLers tell it, won Anoka County 53-39%?
- Or how about explaining that massive Erik Paulsen victory in the County?

There. Another 5 weeks of material for Mr. Aanerud. We're always happy to be helpful. And after these dismal results, maybe the District 49 DFL will be looking for some new leadership.

THE ANOKA-HENNEPIN SANTA LIST

Last week, the Watchdog examined Anoka County's 2011 legislative agenda, otherwise known as the "Santa List," for all the unrealistic goodies hoped for by local officials.

The Anoka-Hennepin School District List is much the same, with all sorts of hope for stocking stuffers like cash or the freedom to raise cash without having to hassle with those annoying voters.

For example, the district would like the ability to renew "existing" levies without having to go to the voters for approval. The twist is that the renewal levy could also be adjusted for inflation, meaning more money would be raised than the current levy.

No thanks. If anything, more local tax increases should go to the voters for approval. The folks who serve on school boards and city councils fly under the radar with little scrutiny from the media while providing too little transparency themselves.

Take a look at local unit of government's web site. Most agenda documents aren't available while the minutes from previous meetings are posted weeks after the fact.

The current system of making school districts justify their property tax increases has worked well. In fact, Anoka-Hennepin has done a great job scarring voters into approving their tax increases over the years.

Having said that, with taxpayers and the entire system reaching the breaking point, the school board sees the writing on the wall and is looking for the ability to raise taxes without tapped-out taxpayers having the ability to say "no."

Most of the rest of the agenda also has to do with items that would put more money into the district's pocket. Consistent with past fear-mongering, we're told that failure to bring more bucks into the district's coffers will mean "dismantling" education services in the district.

Of course, there's nothing in the legislative agenda to address improving student outcomes to better compete in the global economy and nothing to improve teacher quality.

In addition, you won't find anything in the agenda to reign in the outrageous labor costs that come with defined-benefit retirement plans and gold-plated insurance plans that offer benefits unheard of in the private sector.

This school board is apparently far, far out of touch with the economic reality facing taxpayers. Like they're-on-Mars-and-not-stopping-until-Pluto out of touch.

Then again, it's a school board featuring none other than Kathy Tingelstad, who is no stranger to supporting tax increases.

It's truly amazing to compare the rhetoric of the district when it comes to raising money as opposed to spending money.

When the agenda is raising money, the district is full of fear, gloom, and apprehension. We're told of an impending Armageddon if taxpayers don't fork over more of their hard-earned cash.

But when it comes to spending money, one would think the district is flush with dead presidents. Pay raises flow out the door, generous health insurance benefits continue unabated, ultra-generous defined-benefit retirements remain in effect, and the ranks of folks who get a fat salary doing something besides teaching kids (e.g. diversity counselors) is never reduced.

Here's the deal. When the district gets serious about improving test scores, improving teacher quality, and reigning in labor costs, the Watchdog will get serious about entertaining property tax increases.

Until then, tell the school board to get with reality and learn to do more with less, just like those of us in the real world.

THOSE OVER-WORKED, UNDER-PAID STATE EMPLOYEES

Governor Pawlenty ignited a firestorm of public employee outrage and indignation this week when he rightly called them out for their oversized paychecks and gold-plated benefits.

Of course, the Watchdog was way ahead of the game on this one. Below is a reprinted "Monday Commentary" piece from April of 2009, explaining the nice life unionized state employees enjoy. So, enjoy. Again.

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

To begin, it is true that AFSCME employees are among the lowest-paid in state government. There are many thousands of state employees who make more. For our case study, it is thus more than fair to examine the compensation of a senior AFSCME employee.

Our hypothetical employee is Tom. Tom is a senior AFSCME employee who lives in Owatonna and works at a state facility in the south Metro. Tom works full-time for a Minnesota state agency. Tom has two children and a wife who stays at home with no outside employment.

Tom's contract may be found [here](#).

PAY

Tom is in the Craft, Maintenance and Labor unit and receives pay of \$27.52 per hour, or \$57,462 annually. By comparison, per capita income in Minnesota is \$29,027, just about half of what Tom earns.

The federal poverty threshold for a family of 4 in Minnesota is \$21,200. In short, Tom's family lives a comfortable, if modest, lifestyle on his income alone.

HOLIDAYS

According to Tom's collective bargaining agreement, he gets 10 paid holidays:

Independence Day

Labor Day

Veterans Day

Thanksgiving Day

The Day After Thanksgiving Day

Christmas Day

New Year's Day

Martin Luther King Day

President's Day

Memorial Day

VACATION

As a senior employee, Tom earns 9 hours of vacation per payroll period. Given that the state operates on a bi-monthly pay roll period, there are approximately 26 payroll periods in a year. Hence, Tom accrues 234 hours of paid vacation each year, which equates to over 29 workdays in a year.

SICK LEAVE

The contract allows for the accrual of 4 hours of sick leave per payroll period, which is 104 hours or 13 days per year. In total, if Tom were to take advantage of every hour of vacation and sick leave in a year, plus the paid holidays, he would be paid for 52 days of work where he didn't have to show up. There are 2080 hours in a standard work year. Tom's 418 hours of paid time off are equal to about 20% of his work year.

HEALTH CARE

Among a menu of health care options, Tom has selected the "Advantage" program from Blue Cross to cover himself and his family.

For purposes of illustration, let's assume for just a moment that Tom is single. If Tom were single, he would pay zero out of pocket for premiums, while the state would pay monthly premiums of \$447.28 on his behalf.

To cover his family, Tom pays \$130.20 in monthly premiums, while the employer share of his monthly premium is \$1315.34.

RETIREMENT

As a government union member, Tom receives a "defined benefit" retirement from the state. By contrast, most private sector workers receive a "defined contribution" retirement.

A "defined benefit" plan gives Tom a guaranteed retirement benefit based on a mathematical formula. This benefit is primarily provided and guaranteed by the state as a fringe employment benefit, although Tom is required to contribute a small part of his pay each month to his retirement account.

A "defined contribution" retirement plan provides benefits based solely upon what an employee contributes to the plan. If the employee is lucky, his employer will match a certain percentage of what the worker invests.

Since Tom is a senior state employee who was hired in 1980, he may be eligible to retire at any age, as long as he has at least 30 years of eligible employment. For many state employees, full retirement eligibility starts at age 65, with at least three years of state service. However, some state employees hired prior to July 1, 1989, are eligible for full retirement with 30-years of service, regardless of age. Here, there is a similarity with the private sector, where General Motors has a similar retirement plan.

In sum, AFSME employee Tom has an annual salary of over \$57,000, paid time off in the neighborhood of 378 hours, a defined-benefit retirement package, and monthly health care premiums of \$130 per month.

DO YOU think Tom is fairly compensated? Should he be spared a furlough?

We think not.

E-mail Update 12/27/10

In This Issue:

EDITOR'S NOTE: Well, Watchdogs, it's time. It's time to draw the curtain on another year of unparalleled journalistic excellence.

2010 was a truly remarkable year in the county, chock full of surprising good news as well as deeply disappointing happenings.

As you would expect, this last issue of 2010 is dedicated to recapping the top 5 stories of 2010 as selected by the Watchdog staff.

Enjoy. May this coming year be filled with joy, peace, happiness, good health, and prosperity!

#5: ANOKA-HENNEPIN SCHOOL DISTRICT TEST SCORES

This past year saw a growing consensus that our schools are failing to educate our children. Even Democrats joined the chorus of elected officials calling for a radical intervention to save our kids from union-dominated government schools.

Just this past week, we read of nearly 25% of Army recruits failing the very simple math and English concepts presented in the entrance exam they're required to take, making the state of our schools a national security issue as well.

This piece from July 18, 2010 shows our schools here in the area are no better.

ANOKA-HENNEPIN SCHOOLS ARE BAD

Yes, the Watchdog just said it. We just said what many taxpayers in the Anoka-Hennepin School District are thinking.

The release of the latest standardized reading and math test scores reveals just how little taxpayers are getting in the way of results in this district.

The Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments-II (MCAs) were administered in both reading and math to third through eighth graders while 10th graders were tested in reading only and 11th graders in math only.

Unfortunately, the annual ritual of low test scores continues in District 11.

Overall, 69% of the district's students are proficient in math while 74% are proficient in reading. In other words, 7 out of every 10 students aren't proficient in math while 1 out of 4 don't read too good (irony emphasized).

When individual schools are examined, some of the results are downright horrifying.

Start with our high schools, where it appears students and staff are out to lunch in general.

- At Anoka HS, only 39% are proficient in math;
- At Blaine HS, 40% are proficient in math.

At two of the state's biggest high schools, 60% of the kids aren't proficient in math.

- At Champlin Park, only 42% are proficient in math;
- At Andover HS, it's 54%.

And at the district's high school catering to unwed mothers and recovering substance abusers, Crossroads Alternative, a stunning 97% ARE NOT proficient in math. That's a statistic that compares favorably to inner-city Detroit or any Third World locale.

Can anyone make a case that Crossroads should remain open? Just what are taxpayers getting for their investment here?

math scores at some of the district's elementary schools aren't much better.

- Evergreen Park, 58% are proficient;
- L.O. Jacob 55% proficient.

And while the reading scores were marginally better than math in the aggregate, reading is frankly less important than math. Math concepts underpin the high technology global economy. Nations that best innovate with respect to high technology will be the ones that prosper in the future.

American kids will soon enter the work force and find themselves competing directly with students from China, India, and Europe for coveted math and science-based jobs.

With so many high school students demonstrating that they lack proficiency in math, it is a clear warning sign that the nation is in danger of losing its preeminent position as a leader in technology, thus endangering our position as the world's most prosperous nation.

While this news is certainly unwelcome, it is somewhat encouraging to note that many leaders, including some Democrats, now understand that the inefficiencies and poor results produced by the Government School monopoly and the teacher union cartel put the nation at risk.

America is finally starting to wake up to the fact that competition in education is desperately needed to break up the Monopoly and the Cartel.

Sadly, it looks like yet another cohort of Anoka-Hennepin 11th graders have been shortchanged in the meantime.

#4: REPUBLICANS IN A KNOCK OUT.

The 2010 elections saw Republicans ride a wave as they were swept into power in Washington, Saint Paul, and just about everywhere in between at the local and state level.

Anoka County helped generate that wave, as this bellweather county broke heavily towards the GOP, sending many DFLers packing in the process.

Here's what we said in our special post-election edition on November 3rd:

LEGISLATIVE RACES

Like much of the rest of the state, the GOP cleaned up in Anoka County, winning some DFL seats and not losing a single one of their own.

Here are the top 5 legislative races in Anoka County from election night, in order of importance.

1. Don Betzold vs. Pam Wolf (Senate District 51)

One of the most surprising results from anywhere in the state, teacher Pam Wolf came out of nowhere to topple DFL state Senator Don Betzold in District 51.

Betzold, of Fridley, was an 18-year incumbent who had bested Wolf by a comfortable 9 points in 2006.

A committee chairman, Betzold had never won massive victories in the district but was always helped by large expenditures made on his behalf.

Wolf truly prevailed in a David versus Goliath match up and will bring a fresh perspective, especially on fiscal issues.

Betzold is infamous in Watchdog lore as once telling Harold Hamilton regarding Northstar rail, "It doesn't matter what it costs. It's the right thing to do."

Betzold's profile in the Politics in Minnesota Capitol directory notes that he is an amateur photographer who plans to donate his pictures of the Capitol to the Historical Society when he retires.

That number is 651-259-3000.

2. Leo Foley vs. Benjamin Kruse (Senate District 47)

Anoka County played a large part in delivering the Republican surge that brought them majority status in the state Senate.

DFL incumbent Leo Foley had always managed to survive his races, where in four previous election cycles he never got more than 50% of the vote.

Foley's luck ran out this year as Benjamin Kruse finally took out Foley with a narrow victory.

It was somewhat surprising that Foley ran for re-election, given that rumors have run rampant regarding the octogenarian's health.

Most political observers remark that Foley ran a lackluster campaign, with Kruse's not much better.

Even though state Senators normally serve a four year term, Kruse and other Senators will stand for re-election in 2012 after redistricting.

Kruse is sure to be challenged by a more energetic candidate that year, perhaps state Rep. Melissa Hortman or state Rep. Denise Dittrich.

Kruse needs to begin preparing for that race today.

3. Jerry Newton vs. Branden Petersen (House District 49B)

This race wasn't too surprising to the Watchdog, which noted that despite the DFL lore surrounding Coon Rapids, it is actually a classic swing district within a swing county.

This area has long been a bellwether, having voting for Obama in 2008 and George Bush both in 2004 and 2000.

Thus it wasn't too surprising when Republican rookie Branden Petersen upended DFL state Rep. Jerry Newton, who has run for every office this side of dog catcher in the area over the course of the past 16 years.

Petersen eked out a victory by running an excellent campaign fueled primarily by his own shoe leather and sweat equity.

Newton didn't help his own cause by getting a late start as well as casting votes in Saint Paul that were out of step with the district.

The good news for Petersen is that he earned a well deserved victory and will now have his chance to serve in the legislature.

The bad news is that this is a swing district that will require his undivided attention election after election. One false move by a legislator in this area can spell disaster. The Dog also salutes Jerry Newton. Anyone who knows him can testify to the fact that he's truly one of the nice guys in politics.

We wish Jerry well. At age 73, is he done with campaigns?

4. Michelle Benson vs. Paul "fat chance" Meunier (Senate District 49)

This race shouldn't have been on anyone's radar but for the fact that the DFL talked a whole lot of smack about this being a potential pick up opportunity for them.

This race also attracted the Dog's attention because the DFL candidate, Paul Meunier, was a stealth candidate who did all he could to hide his true liberal leanings from the voters in Senate District 49.

Republican Michelle Benson, who defeated incumbent GOP Senator Debbie Johnson for the endorsement, went on to whip Meunier like a rented mule 60-40, proving that Meunier's "fair chance" for all campaign became a "fat chance" debacle for him personally.

What's so devastating for Meunier is that he is the sitting Mayor of Ham Lake, yet LOST EVERY PRECINCT IN THE CITY in his bid for state senate.

That's a stunning rebuke when a sitting mayor loses every precinct in his city. One Republican state Senator who campaigned with Benson in September in Ham Lake commented to the Watchdog regarding how many Ham Lakers disliked Meunier.

Meunier had been the rising star for a small group of liberal Ham Lakers who wanted to see the area become more "progressive."

Hopefully, we've seen the last of them and Paul Meunier.

Meunier also left quite a legacy on the Ham Lake city council. After Tuesday's election, all four members of the council and the mayor are rock solid conservatives (more on that below).

5. Denise Dittrich vs. Cameron Roberson (House District 47A)

DFL state Rep. Denise Dittrich barely survived election night by garnering just 50% of the vote against Cameron Roberson, the Republican endorsee who earned 49%. Roberson ran an underdog campaign against a well-funded incumbent and nearly won.

If this race is a rematch in 2012, Dittrich has to be hearing footsteps behind her. This Republican-leaning district is ripe for turnover in 2012, especially if Roberson continues to campaign this year, next year, and into 2012.

#3: THE SUN SETS ON DAN ERHART

In many respects, 2010 will be remembered as the year the Good Ol' Boys lost their grip on power in Anoka County. After decades of unchallenged control, 2010 saw the Boys pushed to the sidelines.

Thus, it was with great fanfare and solemnity that Watchdog founder Harold Hamilton defrocked the Godfather, Dan Erhart, of his title as Good Ol' Boy Godfather.

For abused taxpayers in Anoka County, this was our equivalent of the Berlin Wall coming down.

Here's what we observed on November 15th:

ELECTION NIGHT LOSER VOLUME I

And it all crashes down

And you break your crown

And you point the finger but there's no one around

Just want one thing, just to play the king

But the castle's crumbled and your left with just a name

Where's your crown, King Nothing?

- James Hetfield

As we mentioned in our election post-mortem, the political world in Minnesota was turned upside down by angry voters, creating a bevy of winners and losers.

The same can be said for Anoka County, home for many decades to the Good Ol' Boys who have lately attempted to rebrand themselves as "progressives," as if that moniker held any cache with the liberty-loving denizens of Oak Grove, Columbia Heights, Linwood, and all points in between.

Regardless of what they call themselves, the Good Ol' Boys took a beating on election night, making the biggest election night loser a man who wasn't even on the ballot. That man being none other than Good Ol' Boy Godfather Dan Erhart.

The Watchdog makes no effort to conceal our relief over Erhart's marginalization and isolation after this historic election.

It was indeed a bad night for the Godfather.

First, he watched as the County's pork barrel sugar daddy, Jim Oberstar went to down to a stunning defeat in the Eighth Congressional District.

As Chairman of the House Transportation Committee and an unapologetic purveyor of budget busting pork, Oberstar was Batman to Erhart's Robin.

Oberstar was the pipeline to Washington dollars for many goofy, money wasting transportation projects in the county, including Northstar rail and the Duluth tourist train.

But the real bonus with Oberstar at the helm was that the Chairman could almost guarantee that projects would make it through the process either the legitimate way or via ear marking.

No more.

There is no way to overstate how historic it was for Watchdogs in this county to see Oberstar gone. Without him turning on the spigot, there is no money to grease the skids for these mega projects.

Oh, by the way, Erhart's need for junkets to DC should be gone as well.

On a side note, we should also point out that Good Ol' Boy lobbyist Elwyn Tinklenberg took a hit on election night when Oberstar went down. What a shame.

Commissioner Erhart also has problems on the county board as well. The monolithic tax and spend county board he knew for so many years has changed, leaving him isolated and bereft of any real influence.

While time will reveal the factions and ad hoc coalitions on the new Board, it looks like there are three distinct factions. One consists of fiscally conservative champions of accountable government led by Rhonda Sivarajah along with the newly re-elected Robyn West and newcomer Matt Look.

A second faction is a bit more moderate and is a swing group made up of rookies Carol LeDoux and Andy Westerberg. Both have some pro-business credentials but both have also supported big government projects. It will be interesting to see where these two land on various issues. But most importantly, neither is a member of the Cult of Erhart Personality like Dennis Berg and Margaret Langfeld.

That leaves just Erhart and Jim Kordiak as the tattered remnants of the Good Ol' Boys network.

Much like communism, we can relegate Erhart's Reign of Taxpayer Abuse to the dustbin of history.

His influence is now more in the nature of a historical footnote, like when Portugal was a naval power or when Mesopotamia mattered.

The Watchdog hereby strips Erhart of the title "Godfather."

Will 2012 spell the end of Erhart's political career?

#2: NORTHSTAR RAIL IS A BUST

Northstar commuter rail was the issue that provided the impetus for Harold Hamilton to found the Anoka County Watchdog. The groupthink mentality that pushed county opinion makers to pursue this white elephant without critically examining the facts and assumptions underneath appalled Hamilton.

Northstar's dismal first-year ridership numbers show the train to be a bust and allows the Watchdog to reluctantly say "we told you so" to the thousands of taxpayers who will be forced to subsidize this monster for decades to come.

Erhart's folly, indeed. Here's the story from December 6th:

WHAT?! NORTHSTAR RAIL A BUST?

Yeah, knock the Watchdog over with a feather. Northstar commuter rail, the money-eating mega-project the Good Ol' Boys swore would deliver Anoka County to the land of Milk and Honey has turned out to be what we thought it would be.

Yep, your fearless Watchdog leader Harold Hamilton saw this boondoggle for what it was and made the prescient call that the numbers supporting the project were so much BS and would never deliver.

It only took one year of operation to prove the Watchdog correct and the Good Ol' Boys wrong.

Just a couple of weeks ago, this publication pointed out that the ridership numbers were worse than what was initially reported because the numbers reflected many thousands of folks heading to Target Field by taking a taxpayer-subsidized train ride to a taxpayer-subsidized baseball stadium. Subsidizing some else's leisure activity is a core function of government, right?

We showed that when baseball fans are backed out, the number of commuters riding the train is much worse than what we were promised.

And now the Star Tribune has finally caught up.

It has finally been reported that ridership numbers on Northstar are now a full 20% below forecast. 20%!

Of course, there are all sorts of excuses for this massive forecasting error and no accountability.

It's the economy's fault. It's the price of gasoline. It's the fault of the big bad parking lot owners in Minneapolis who reduced their fees. It's improvements on Highway 10. It's the fact that Northstar is new and needs time to sell.

Gee, the Watchdog remembers when Dan Erhart and crew were telling us that "the studies" all showed that the public was well aware of Northstar and eager to ride it. Commuters were fed up with being prisoners in their cars and were just champing at the bit for an alternative.

We remember the condescending tone of Erhart and others who belittled Northstar skeptics by adopting the slogan "It just makes sense."

So where are the riders, Commissioner Erhart?

The simple fact is that the number of promised riders was a dubious claim from the very start.

It's also somewhat humorous and alarming to observe that the liberal progressive Northstar apologists are using the typical liberal excuses for failed government programs. Namely, the program is failing because there isn't enough of it.

If only Northstar would go to Saint Cloud, then all would be well. If only Northstar were linked to a train to Duluth, it would all be okay. If only we outlawed cars and mandated everyone to ride the train in the same way Obama has mandated that we all buy health insurance.

Yeah, if we only ran the train another 40 miles up to a city smaller than Coon Rapids it would all be fine. Maybe we could put in some stops in other happening metropolises like Clearwater and Becker to really make the project take off.

And where's the accountability for this fiasco? In the real world, most of us would be fired for being off by 20% on our projections. Who will be held accountable and made to suffer the consequences for this failure?

Unfortunately, this is government and the only ones likely to pay the price will be the taxpayers of this county who will for decades to come pay higher property taxes to subsidize Erhart's Folly.

The one place where the citizens of this good county can hold those responsible accountable is at the polls in 2012, when Dan Erhart will be up for re-election.

Until then, we can take comfort in the fact that incoming Board Chairwoman Rhonda Sivarajah will no doubt make sure Erhart is kept away from rail and transit leadership positions so he can do no more harm.

We have all been made to pay a fearsome price for his legacy project. And what a sad, lengthy, expensive legacy that will be.

#1: RHONDA SIVARAJAH ELECTED ANOKA COUNTY BOARD CHAIRWOMAN
Next month, Commissioner Sivarajah will be elected Chairwoman of the Anoka County Board.

The ascension of a conservative to the most powerful post in Anoka County government is emblematic of the power shift that has taken place in the County over the past 5 years.

Sivarajah's rise from a lonely conservative voice of one on the County Board to being elected chairwoman by her peers mirrors the long march towards political change experienced by every Watchdog who joined our cause and worked for change.

Our November 22nd edition captured the elation anticipation we're all feeling:

MADAM CHAIRWOMAN!

The news just keeps getting better for Watchdogs here in Anoka County. As last week's issue noted, the Anoka County Board took a welcome and decidedly conservative turn on election day.

That turn of events is already paying dividends. Commissioner Rhonda Sivarajah announced last Wednesday that she has secured the commitment of a majority of the incoming board to make her the next Board Chairwoman!

This historic and exciting news means that conservatives will set the agenda on the county board when our Iron Lady takes the gavel early next year. The vote stands as a repudiation of the Good Ol' Boy "Progressives" and signals a new era in county government.

It was just a few short years ago that Rhonda was the only conservative on the board, frequently the only "no" vote on many 6-1 board votes. Many of the "progressives" snickered behind her back and dismissed her brand of fiscal accountability and limited government.

Progress was made in 2006 when Robyn West was election to the board, giving conservatives a beachhead on the Board and two votes in favor of good government.

On election night, Matt Look took over district 1 from the Good Ol' Boys.

Over in District 2, former GOP state Representative Andy Westerberg won the open seat vacated by Dick Lang.

These four have secured the chair for Sivarajah. It's been a long journey for the Iron Lady and her supporters as she has gone from a lonely (albeit correct) voice in the wilderness to the most powerful woman in Anoka County politics.

Having said all this, Sivarajah will have to watch her back. There are still powerful Good Ol' Boy sympathizers roaming the halls of county government. These folks will be looking to undermine her authority and limit her success as the county board heads into a pivotal election in 2012 after redistricting. These folks would love to deliver a one-two knockout punch by first making her unsuccessful as board chair and then taking her out in 2012.

The good news is that Rhonda Sivarajah is a smart, savvy, tough leader who has her own army of supporters both inside and outside county government.

We've been there for her from the start and we'll be there to stand with her going forward.

Congratulations, Rhonda!