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## OUR VIEW: PREP SPORTS

# Minnesota bucks the national trend

As a new prep sports season approaches, we are pleased to note that Minnesota is bucking a discouraging national trend: While participation in high school sports sagged nationally, Minnesota is one of three states in which participation rose last school year.

### Why it matters:

The number of high schoolers in athletic programs nationally declined last year for the first time in decades, but participation continues to rise in Minnesota.

Physical activity is an important component of a healthy lifestyle, and as our society becomes increasingly sedentary, our population becomes increasingly obese. Adolescents who exercise have a better chance of maintaining that activity into adulthood.

The decline in overall participation, reported this week by the National Federation of State High School Associations, carries some interpretive complications. It comes after three decades of increases; the bulk numbers were still the third-highest on record.

And it is driven largely by a falloff in football. The number of high-schoolers nationally playing 11-man football fell by almost 31,000 in 2018-19; the total decline in athletic participation was more than 43,000.

It doesn't take a great leap of imagination to connect football's decline to the steady drumbeat of information connecting football to concussions and long-term brain damage. Certainly more parents are wary of allowing their sons to play football than they were a decade ago. That said, 11-man football continues to be the nation's highest participation sport with more than 1 million players in 2018-19.

But there are other sports, and other activities, than football. Minnesota's students appear to be taking advantage of that fact. Minnesota is 22nd in the nation in population, but we're 10th in the number of high school athletes. The Gopher State punches above its weight in that category.

Of particular note in Minnesota is that this state leads the nation in girls' participation in athletics. There are almost as many girls as boys in Minnesota high school sports, and Minnesota's girls participation rate is triple that of some other states.

That's worthy of our cheers.

## OTHER VIEW

# This robocall crackdown just might work

The San Diego Union-Tribune

Illegal robocalls are a scourge of modern life. Americans got nearly 5 billion such calls last month alone — even though the Federal Trade Commission and its law enforcement partners mounted a crackdown in June and the Federal Communications Commission asserted in February that it had “really beefed up” enforcement efforts.

Against that backdrop, last week's announcement of yet another crackdown might be viewed with skepticism. But it seems promising because it involves 12 of the nation's largest telephone companies, including mobile giants AT&T, Sprint, T-Mobile and Verizon.

After negotiations with attorneys generals of 50 states and the District of Columbia, the companies

have agreed to deploy a new system that would quickly identify which calls were spam using “spoofing,” in which robocall companies use phony phone numbers that look like local numbers to try to get people to pick up.

The companies also agreed to provide their customers with free anti-robocall tools and to take further steps to improve call-blocking technology. There is no deadline on when these promises will be met, but there's an expectation that it will be as soon as possible because of public unhappiness with robocalls.

But still more can be done. A bill that was introduced by a bipartisan group of House members in June would expand the list of nuisance calls that are illegal and increase the penalties that regulators could assess. That measure can't pass soon enough.



# Cities can help save monarchs

By Abigail Derby Lewis and Adele Simmons  
Chicago Tribune

It's that time of year again, when flashes of the monarch butterfly's orange and black wings delight people across the upper Midwest. The iconic species is on its northward journey, looking for milkweed to lay its eggs. We see these butterflies feeding on nectar near agricultural fields, in community parks and in our backyards. We even see them deep in urban settings, among vibrant plantings of coneflowers, coreopsis and milkweed near distribution depots and business headquarters. Small but mighty urban habitats play a powerful role in supporting monarchs. And corporate campuses can be star contributors.

The precipitous decline in the monarch population over the last 20 years has garnered much attention. While many factors contribute to the decline, experts believe that loss of milkweed and nectar sources across the Midwest breeding range is a main culprit. An additional 1.8 billion stems of milkweed are needed to stabilize the monarch population, and cities are an unexpected avenue to achieve this goal.

A common perception is that cities are devoid of green space. But monarch butterflies have a different view. And so do researchers at the Field Museum. Recent work by Field scientists reveals urban landscapes can contribute nearly one-third of the additional milkweed stems needed to support monarchs. Enormous opportunities exist in the Chicago region to transform low-performing lawns into high-quality homes for monarchs.

Corporate campuses account for more than 10,000 acres across the region; if every corporate campus took up the challenge to plant milkweed for monarchs, nearly 200,000 stems of milkweed could be added to the Chicago landscape. A great example is



The Associated Press

A monarch butterfly is silhouetted suspended near its empty chrysalis soon after emerging.

Advocate Sherman Hospital in Elgin, which boasts 23 acres of native habitat, including over 4,000 stems of milkweed, on its property.

Planting milkweed and native flowers that monarchs need to survive comes with a suite of benefits for people and business. Monarch habitat requires less energy-intensive management than do traditional manicured landscapes, lowering water use and maintenance costs over time. Landscaping that includes monarch habitat counts toward LEED certification and sustainability plans because the deep-rooted plants reduce flooding and store carbon. These lively green spaces are a welcome asset for people, offering opportunities to breathe cleaner air, restore attention and focus and connect with the natural world.

One of us is a scientist who specializes in conservation ecology and climate change at the Field Museum, where we've planted native gardens and see these benefits in real-time. The other has spent a career in sustainabil-

ity, higher education and philanthropy, much of it in Chicago. We both see the potential for Chicago to be a leader in climate change and increasing quality of life through nature-based solutions.

The collective impact of small-scale plantings adds up to giant gains for monarchs and other wildlife. Chicago corporations can champion this effort by creating highly visible landscapes that directly benefit the monarch recovery and inspire people to take their own actions to support pollinators. We encourage corporations to be a leader and transform their green spaces with native plants and milkweed to save monarchs, lower maintenance costs and provide healthier habitats for people and wildlife.

*Dr. Abigail Derby Lewis is director of the Conservation Tools Program at the Field Museum and project lead on the Urban Monarch Conservation Design multicity effort. Adele Simmons is president of Global Philanthropy Partnership, which focuses on sustainability and philanthropy.*

# How government can expand freedom

WASHINGTON — Complaining about government — its failures, its corruption and, in the worst cases, its capacity to oppress — is both an American pastime and a right to be treasured.

But a wholesome desire to preserve ourselves from foolish or tyrannical rule often devolves into disdainful government altogether. The underlying assumption (I exaggerate only a little) is that everything government undertakes is doomed to be less effective, less beautiful, less innovative and less useful than the work of the private sector.

Yes, there are plenty of horror stories about the misdeeds of public bureaucracies. We hear such tales especially from people who run small businesses and find government rule books and the people charged with enforcing them to be, well, less than user-friendly.

Let's assume all of these stories are true. And then consider another truth: Nearly everyone also has a horror story about dealing with a private bureaucracy — say, a cable or insurance company, a phone service provider, or a bank. When a government bureaucrat fails us, the response is often along the lines of: “Typical government.” But when a private sector bureaucrat fails us, almost nobody says: “Typical private sector.”

This habit is one of the victories of ideological conservatism. We rarely notice the moments when our free, democratically-elected government enhances individual freedom. It did so with civil rights laws on behalf of excluded minorities and for large groups of Americans whose freedom was hemmed in by a shortage of income. Just start with elderly Americans on

Social Security and Medicare and move on there.

We don't associate government with beauty, but what other word describes our national parks or so many of our great public universities? We rarely say the words “government” and “innovation” in the same sentence. But the technology behind the internet through which many will be able to read this column grew out of government-sponsored research and development.

And ponder how many lives have been saved or improved thanks to the brilliant minds at the National Institutes of Health.

We should worship neither the state nor the private sector. But after decades of reflexively running down government, we need to rediscover what it actually does, and can do.

For this reason, I hope every 2020 presidential candidate — yes, I'm being optimistic about President Trump — reads the policy book of the summer, “The Public Option: How to Expand Freedom, Increase Opportunity and Promote Equality,” by Ganesh Sitaraman and Anne Alstott. The two law professors are not interested in government taking over everything. On the contrary, what they seek is to *expand* choice.

A public option, they write, “provides an important service at a reasonable cost, and it coexists, quite peaceably, with one or more private options offering the same service.” Thus: You can use the post office, or ship with FedEx or UPS. You can stay in a national park or go to a private resort. You can use a public library or buy a book. You can head down the fairway at a municipal golf course or join a

country club.

Notice that while public options are available to everyone, they're especially useful for those who don't have a lot of money. Sitaraman and Alstott suggest new areas where they could be helpful: for health insurance, where the idea is already popular; for child care; for retirement savings to supplement Social Security; and for basic banking. The last could address the needs of roughly 14 million Americans, many with low incomes, who have neither checking nor savings accounts.

The authors are under no illusions that every public option will work well all the time, and they acknowledge the difficulties faced by public schools and public housing. But they also rightly insist that the problems facing both are aggravated by “America's intense residential segregation by race and by class.”

Critics of public options might call them socialism. But as Sitaraman and Alstott note, “public options can benefit the private sector.” They can create a more fluid labor market by providing health insurance and retirement coverage that individuals can take with them from one employer to another, thus easing “job lock.” They can also introduce more competition into concentrated markets. Municipally provided broadband, for example, might provide a consumer-friendly alternative to a monopoly provider of high-cost, poor-service internet connections.

“We think it's not only possible but critical to take a pragmatic look at what government can do well,” they write. Such practical hopefulness would be an excellent antidote to the poisonous election campaign we're about to endure.

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