

OPINION



PILOT EDITORIAL

It's time for the JCC school board to call a meeting a meeting

It's time the Jackson County Central Board of Education called a spade a spade. And a meeting a meeting.

A few years ago, the local school board began regularly scheduling what it called "work sessions." Though no definition of "work session" was offered at the time, board members eliminated a handful of committee meetings — at which no board action takes place — in favor of handling such discussion during these work sessions.

Work sessions are nothing new; various other elected boards in Minnesota have them as well, loosely defining them as sessions beyond a routine board meeting during which the board takes no official action. Even the name itself — work session — seems to indicate a gathering of board members for the express purpose of receiving information ahead of making a decision at a future regular meeting.

The school board takes all kinds of formal action at its regular monthly meetings, for which an agenda is prepared and distributed. Members of the public may review the agenda ahead of time and evaluate the relative importance of each action item in advance. The school board does not distribute an agenda for its work sessions. There is no opportunity for public review ahead of time.

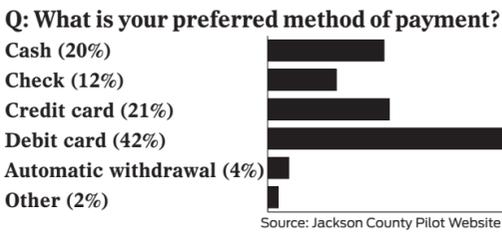
In recent months, the school board has taken formal action at its work sessions. In March, the board approved a snow-day makeup plan at a work session. At last Monday's work session, the board approved asking voters to approve a \$35 million bond issue. No agenda was released for either; no advance public review was possible.

What the board did was legal. The board's regular monthly work sessions have been properly noticed as public meetings and are open to the public. In fact, in being properly noticed and open to the public, the regular monthly work sessions are not work sessions at all — they are regular meetings, according to Minnesota state statute. And, if recent past practice shows us anything, board members are treating them as such, feeling free to take formal action during the course of them. To continue to refer to these regular meetings as work sessions is unclear at best and deceptive at worst.

Here's urging the school board to drop the "work session" label, plan for two regular school board meetings each month and distribute a public agenda for both ahead of each.

We're all intelligent adults here. Call a spade a spade, and call a meeting a meeting.

LAST WEEK'S ONLINE POLL



THIS WEEK'S ONLINE POLL

Q: How often do you attend your high school class reunion?

Vote online at jacksoncountypilot.com.

The deep, dark days of chocolate

For years, I shied away from dark chocolate. In fact, if I were gifted with a box of chocolate or broke down and bought myself one, the darkest chocolate pieces were the last to be consumed, if at all.

It wasn't that I was prejudiced against dark chocolate. It was because I liked that creamy milk chocolate best and all the good stuff living inside each piece.

Then one day, my doctor suggested I start eating the dark stuff because it has some health benefits. And if anybody needed health benefits, it was me.

Not a lot of it, of course, he cautioned, but when hungry for a piece of chocolate, he suggested I grab the dark stuff

first and share the milk chocolate with friends.

Now I have come to enjoy dark chocolate even more than the milk chocolate pieces, but feel kind of guilty passing the unhealthy milk chocolate pieces off on my friends.

I really haven't lost any of my friends in this experiment either, as they seem to prefer the milk chocolate over the dark stuff, like I used to.

But I do wonder if their health might be suffering because of my generosity. I even suggested that to a friend, but he just grabbed another piece of the smooth milky chocolate I was presenting to him and said, "Stop worrying about it. Most of us eat what we like and, if given a choice between healthy

and something not so healthy, choose the good, tasty stuff."

I thought at that point I should tell my friend what my doctor told me, but then I counted the number of dark chocolate pieces I had left and decided to keep my mouth shut.

I don't like to think about those dark days of chocolate, but I do enjoy being able to savor dark chocolate without the guilt of my milk chocolate days of the past.

And as long as my friends keep liking the milk chocolate and continue to live to tell about my generosity and self-sacrifice in letting them go for their favorite milk chocolate pieces first, I don't really feel like I am contributing to

their demise.

At least not yet, as I do tell them about the benefits of oily fish once in a while, as well as kale, and suggest they eat those too. To which one friend asked, "Do they come in milk chocolate?"

And that probably says a lot about my chocolate-loving friends, as well — at least one of them.



OUT AND ABOUT
Mike Jordan

Storm proves good people still do exist

Lately, with the weather attempting to decide if it's warm or cool, we have been treated to some seriously beautiful thunderstorms. This past weekend was no exception.

Saturday night the weather changed abruptly and, when I looked at the radar, it showed we had a giant headed toward us. A friend of mine was sending me pics of the lightning on the edge of town and I told him while I usually don't care about storms, this one made me a little nervous.

As the storm got closer, the thunder got louder, and the lightning brighter. Suddenly I heard a loud crash, but it sounded like it was in my house. I started to walk around and I realized the power was out in half of my house. I looked around, noticed nothing inside was tipped over and went to the basement to check the

fuse box. Nothing wrong there, so I went back upstairs and peered out the window. That's when I noticed how dark it was. I couldn't see a thing because the street lights were out, but when the lightning struck, I saw a truly scary scene.

Back in July, I had a big tree branch fall off one of my trees. No warning; it just dropped off. Well, this storm was determined to take out more than just a branch; it wanted the whole tree, and it got it.

When the lightning lit up my street, I saw a huge tree had fallen, literally feet from my house, and it was holding down a power line. I was scared and, though I knew this stuff happens, I wondered how long it would take to fix.

This was when I realized just how good the Jackson utility guys are. Within a half-hour of the phone call, they were up assessing the damage.

A half-hour after, they had a crew up there and were sorting things out. The most amazing part? My 3-year-old slept through the whole thing — the giant thunder claps, the chainsaws cutting branches off of the tree to free the power line and, of course, my dogs barking at all of the activity. The power was back on maybe an hour or so after the line went down, and I was incredibly grateful.

The next morning when my son did wake up, I told him he missed out on so much, and I showed him the tree. He was instantly thrilled. He had a whole tree fort to climb around in, from his perspective. He played for a bit and, when he took his afternoon nap, a group of guys my dad knew came over. By the time my son was up from his nap, the tree was gone. The only sign it was there to begin with was the big round stump in

the ground, and the wood shavings from the tree. It was completely amazing, and showed me good people do exist.

So to the Jackson utility guys — thank you. You were out in the pouring rain, and had the power back on faster than I ever expected. To the guys who came over and took care of the tree in my yard — you have no idea how grateful I am. And to those out there who are having a hard time believing good people still exist — let me tell you, they do.



GONE COUNTRY
Laura DeKok

READERS WRITE

Consider walking or biking to school

To the editor:
With school starting soon, we would like to encourage students to bike or walk to school! Why is it important for youth to walk or bike? Walking and biking enables children to incorporate the regular physical activity they need each day while also forming healthy habits that can last a lifetime. Furthermore, youth need at least 60 minutes of activity per day. When they walk or bike to school, they are participating in physical activity.

Before the school year starts, it is important for caregivers to sit down with their children and talk about safety and rules, whether the child is walking, biking or taking the bus. Parents can scout routes before school starts or walk or bike with them the first day to make it more comfortable, especially for younger students. There is no federal law setting a legal age minimum before children can walk to school alone. Parents make that determination. The same is true about riding a bike to school.

Here are a few safety tips: Do not text while walking or biking to school. Motorists should not block crosswalks; this causes walkers and bikers to move closer to traffic. Motorists should slow down in school zones. Consider carpooling if not taking the bus, biking or walking; this will help eliminate congestion around school drop-off zones.

Happy trails, and have a fun school year.

Lynne Anderson and MaryAnne Finstad
Friends of the Jackson County Trails
Jackson

Hagedorn wrong about ACA

To the editor:
"Frankly, I don't believe access to health care is a right." So said local U.S. Rep. Jim Hagedorn at a recent town hall meeting, adding, "Obamacare," as he calls the Affordable Care Act, "is a disaster."

Is it a disaster for children to stay on their parents' health insurance until age 26? Or for people with pre-existing conditions to not be denied health coverage by insurance companies? Or that insurance companies can't discriminate against women by charging higher premiums as they did before ACA? Insurance policies must now cover mental health care as part of the essential health benefits in ACA.

According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, insurance premiums went down in 2019 and could have decreased even more if not for the regulatory sabotages on ACA made by this administration. That research also shows that since 2014, when the law went into effect, 26.6 million more Americans now have health care coverage. Not a disaster, but an achievement.

While the law does need adjustments, it has positive measurable outcomes. Hagedorn chooses not to acknowledge this. He wants a health care system that puts citizens with pre-existing conditions into high-risk pools. He wants loosely regulated short-term policies to replace the essential benefit plans that insurance companies must now offer. Those ideas would be a disaster.

Judy Bird
Byron

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310 Second Street • Jackson, MN
(507) 847-3771 • jacksoncountypilot.com
Published Weekly on Thursday
USPS 271880

Periodicals postage paid at Jackson, Minnesota

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

In Jackson County, \$55.00/Year. Elsewhere in the United States, \$65.00/Year. Nine-month students, \$45.00. ePilot, \$30.00/Year.



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