

# OPINION

"CONGRESS SHALL MAKE NO LAW...  
ABRIDGING THE FREEDOM  
OF SPEECH, OR OF THE PRESS;"

The First Amendment of the United States Constitution

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## Editorial

### Election process

Tower City Council is failing to take the primary election breakdown seriously

As we reported two weeks ago, St. Louis County officials conducted an investigation into the handling of the Aug. 14 primary election in the city of Tower. Their findings were stunning, documenting fundamental failures in all aspects of the election process—from pre-election testing of equipment, to election administration and training, to election day process, to reporting of results, to post-vote handling of ballots.

These findings were included in an Aug. 24 letter to members of the Tower City Council from County Elections Supervisor Phil Chapman.

That letter did not appear on the council's Aug. 27 meeting agenda, nor did it appear on the council agenda during their Sept. 10 meeting earlier this week. Trivial correspondence to the city regularly appears on the city's agenda. Yet a detailed letter from the county elections supervisor detailing systematic failure in a recent city election, and which orders the city to pay for retraining of its city clerk, somehow fails to warrant the council's attention?

Citizens in Tower should be very concerned.

The county investigation revealed a failure of duty on the part of the city's election administrator that is unacceptable. It reflects disregard for her sworn obligations and an unwillingness to own up to her failures. And the only reason we know about these failures is because, in this instance, we had an outside authority who actually looked into it. The city council had no intention of investigating the matter, nor does it believe anyone should be held accountable for a fundamental breakdown of a constitutional process.

The city clerk has attempted to blame the county for the election disaster, which is ridiculous. It wasn't St. Louis County that failed to conduct the pre-election testing of the city's vote-counting equipment and auto-mark machine as required by law, and then certified that the testing had been conducted properly. It wasn't St. Louis County that forced

the city clerk to process absentee ballots contrary to state law. It wasn't St. Louis County that reported 345 ballots in the city's ballot box at the end of the primary voting on Aug. 14, when only 131 voters had signed-in to obtain a ballot. Those numbers were reported by the city clerk, and as far as we know, no one on the city council has inquired as to how such a number was reported to the county. Rather, it appears the council is content to sweep the whole matter under the rug.

By failing to address the results of the county investigation publicly, the council has done nothing to demonstrate that they take this matter seriously. Which means city residents have real reason to question the conduct of the upcoming general election. The city can't rely on the county to do the city's job. Ultimately, it is the city of Tower that is responsible for the administration of its elections and we have real concerns about whether a day of retraining for the clerk, as ordered by the county, will make much difference. The rules of election procedure are readily available to all election officials, as they are to the public. In reality, the conduct of the Aug. 14 primary suggests that officials in Tower simply did not care enough to do their jobs properly.

The city has an obligation to its residents to guarantee that the general election is run properly—which is why they should arrange for a qualified outside observer to monitor and offer guidance on the administration of the general election in Tower this year.

Yes, this will cost money, just as it will cost city taxpayers money to send the city clerk for elections retraining. But voting is a constitutional right and the city cannot allow a repeat of last month's disaster. What's more, some of the races on the ballot this year could be very close contests, and the last thing the city of Tower wants is to have its balloting procedures become central to recount litigation. Just ask the folks in Florida.



## Letters from Readers

### Ely should welcome the CC's new owners

I have been active during the last six years trying to find a reason for the Ely Community Center to exist and to ensure its survival, so I have some history to share. In 2012 a small group of us worked to convince the City to keep the Community Center and upgrade it rather than to vacate it and build a new building for the library. We were not successful. Nor was a similar group that worked to finance upgrades in the 1990s.

The year 2012 would have been a great time to save the building as a community center because it could have had the City's backing. But as we all know, that didn't happen. Since that time the building has been vacated, had the heat turned off and suffered some damage. The City has made good faith efforts to maintain the building, but empty buildings are not easily maintained.

Without the city's interest in using the building, a sale to an interested party becomes the only possible alternative short of demolition. Ely's Heritage Preservation Commission has supported the sale of the building.

Since 2014, the City has entertained multiple proposals for the Community Center. In the past year, the City has had eight. Generally, these proposals fell into two categories. There were proposals from big money people who thought that a 30,000 square foot building for \$85,000 (the asking price), was a good deal and they figured they could make some money off of it. These people had no business plan, and as far as I could tell, no interest in Ely. None of these people ever even came to town to see the building. Then there were several proposals to restore the building to a community center, but although the intentions may have been good, we never saw a plan. These people have had more than ample time to create business plans.

The Yoons' proposal was the first proposal with a legitimate business plan that I have seen (it's available at City Hall if you are interested)—their plan included a

description of their business, their strategy, projected incomes and expenditures, an analysis of the competitive environment, and a market analysis. It's a 40-page document that describes it all. They really want to do something with the building and they have spent considerable time planning for it.

I was able to meet the Yoons when they came to Ely to see the building. I offered to provide them with my standard driving tour of Ely (it's available at no cost during the summer). They asked questions about the educational system (they have three small children), they asked about crime in Ely (they want a safe environment for their family), and they wanted to meet the guy in the jeep, which didn't actually happen, but they were interested. We completed the tour with a stop at Semer's Park where their kids played on the neighborhood.

So we have the Yoons, who have made what I consider the first legitimate offer the City has seen. There are no guarantees. Starting and running a small business is always hard. In Ely it's harder. I don't have to tell the people of Ely about that. But I think these people have a shot at it and deserve a chance. If they don't meet the terms of the purchase agreement which requires progress on the building, the building will revert back to the City.

So I welcome our new neighbors, not just because they are nice people, although that should be reason enough, but also because I think they might be able to make their project a success and the Community Center a vital building once again. I hope you will welcome them too.

Celia Domich  
Ely

### When will government start to really regulate big business?

The newest crisis in industrial pollution illustrates how often government passes the buck and lets corporations get away with criminal chemical trespass.

Dicamba is an herbicide made for applying to genetically altered soybeans. It kills the weeds but not the bean plants. The problem arises when humidity and rising temperatures cooperate to make the Dicamba vaporize and then travel to a neighbor's garden, commercial orchard or vegetable farm, even state parks. The Dicamba destroys every plant in its path that is not bred to be resistant, which is most trees and other vegetation.

Applicators and farmers are not held responsible because they claim to spray according to label. Government agencies pass the buck back and forth because they fear the powerful chemical companies and cannot decide jurisdiction. The makers of Dicamba claim their research shows that their newer versions do not vaporize or travel. Small victims have little or no legal recourse with few financial resources.

This is similar to the events that transpired when Reserve Mining was dumping its tailings and other illegal pollutants into Lake Superior. The DNR and Reserve's parent companies denied, lied and obfuscated until the commercial fishermen brought evidence to bear and the MPCA stepped in with a lawsuit. You can read about it in Grant Merritt's new book, "Water and Iron."

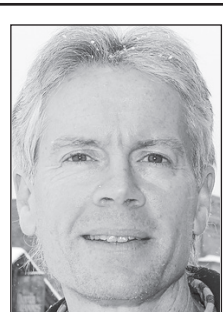
Proponents of Cu-Ni mining say that Minnesota has the most strict environmental laws in the nation. Yet, the mining industry states that they cannot comply with the sulfate mandate restrictions because it is too expensive. Minntac's unlined tailings pond has leaked for decades with no end in sight, and the Sand River and Dark River are its depositories. Records of abundant wild rice in the Sand River system are just that, a past occurrence.

Often it seems that we live in a corporate-ocracy, not a democracy, if even agencies assigned to govern cannot make industries do what they are supposed to do. That's why I have no enthusiasm for the claims of proponents of Cu-Ni mining in our water-rich environment.

Mark Roalson  
Hoyt Lakes

## Copper-nickel? The data say it's bad economics

The ongoing debate about the pros and cons of copper-nickel mining near Ely has been cast by many as the stereotypical clash between jobs and the environment. It's a familiar means of framing the issue, but I believe it overlooks a critical component—namely that the fundamental



MARSHALL  
HELMSEBERGER

argument against copper-nickel mining near Ely is economic, not environmental.

By saying so, I don't mean to give short shrift to the environmental concerns, which are significant. Anyone who believes that the environmental impacts of a copper-nickel mine will

bear any relationship to the effects of Ely's Pioneer Mine, or even modern-day taconite mining, is badly misinformed. Due to the geological differences, sulfide-based ore mining is inherently far riskier, and those risks are heightened dramatically in a water-rich environment. Given the incalculable value of the wilderness resource that a copper-nickel mine in the Rainy River watershed puts at risk, it can credibly be argued that this is the worst place on the planet

for such a mine.

Supporters argue that the risks are worth it for the economic boost they believe such a mine would bring.

Yet there is a remarkable amount of economic data and research, as we reported on our front page last week, that suggests that a new mine will not bring the economic benefits that its supporters believe. Ely, over the past few decades, has made considerable progress pursuing amenity-based economic

development, which is a well-established and widely-pursued model for economic growth in the U.S. Far from boosting the economy, there is considerable economic research, including the study recently produced by a pair of Harvard economists, that predicts a new mine will simply disrupt the progress Ely has made and leave the local economy weaker overall within just a few years.

See **ECONOMICS...**pg. 5