

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

State employment

Relocating government jobs could significantly boost rural Minnesota

Gov. Tim Walz has rightly made boosting the economic prospects of rural Minnesota a key part of his One Minnesota agenda.

Major investment in rural broadband, which is high on the governor's agenda, is certainly one way to provide new economic opportunity in non-metro parts of the state. His plan to boost local government aid and education funding will also yield benefits for rural Minnesota.

But here's one more thing that should be on the governor's agenda: Spreading more of the state workforce outside of the Twin Cities metropolitan area. The state of Minnesota is an enormous employer, with a permanent workforce that averages about 35,000 people. Right now, about 21,000 of those employees, or about 61 percent, work in the seven-county metro area. That leaves just over 13,000 jobs spread out across the rest of Minnesota, about a quarter of those with the Department of Natural Resources.

These are good jobs, that pay a very livable wage and come with a strong benefits package. In other words, they are the kinds of jobs that are desperately needed in rural Minnesota. These are the kinds of jobs that would provide a significant and stable economic boost to communities all across the state, including here in northeastern Minnesota.

Clearly, many state jobs will always remain in the Twin Cities, since many state workers directly serve metro area residents. But there are many state jobs that are located in the Twin Cities today mostly because that's just the way things were done in the past. Yet there are thousands of state workers who don't necessarily work directly with the public. There are accountants, planners, IT workers, managers and supervisors, media specialists, attorneys, and dozens of other positions that could well be accomplished anywhere in the state with a decent Internet connection.

Relocating state jobs like this would provide many advantages for the state and its workforce.

► Home prices are often significantly lower outside the metro, meaning state workers would likely spend

less on housing.

► Many state workers would likely want to relocate to smaller, safer, and less-congested communities if given the opportunity.

► Renting or buying commercial office space to house state workers in small towns around Minnesota could well be significantly cheaper, saving state dollars.

► The rural workforce is typically extremely reliable and hard-working. The Revenue Center in Ely is an excellent example.

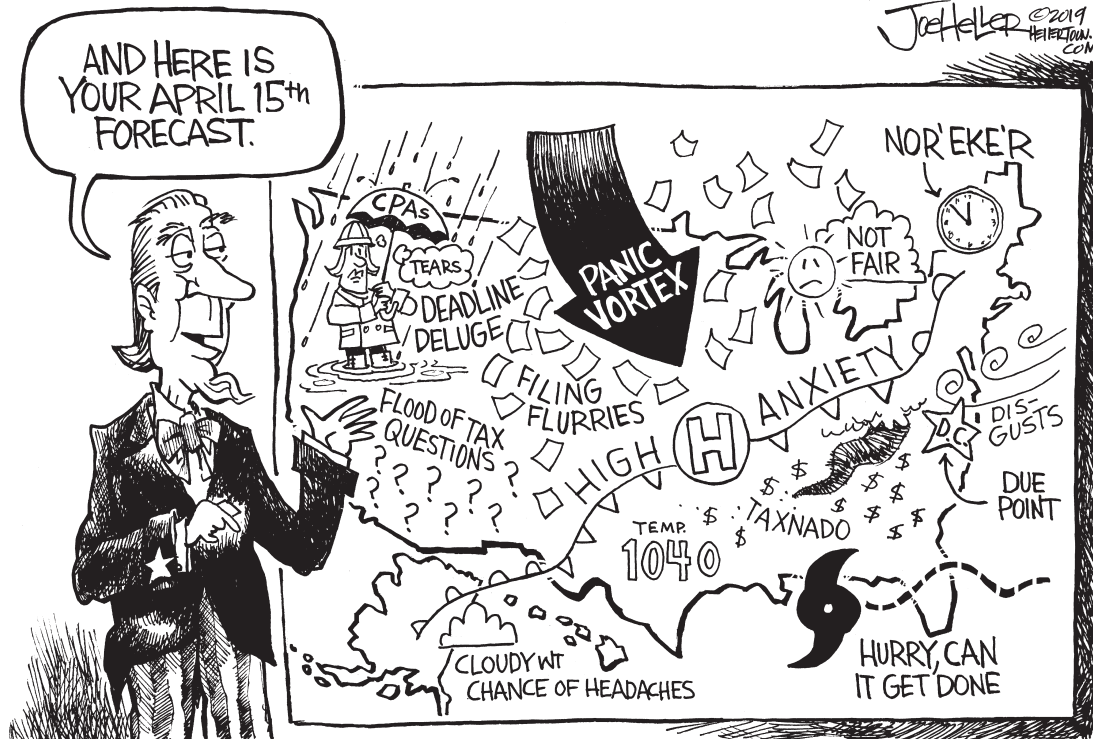
► The creation of several dozen state jobs in a small community would have an enormous impact on the local economy, improving local tax bases, boosting traffic to local businesses and creating demand for additional housing in some cases. Rural parts of the state need these jobs. The metro area has jobs in abundance. Its economy wouldn't even notice the change.

There are many other advantages, but perhaps one of the most significant is that it would substantially benefit rural parts of Minnesota at virtually no cost. This wouldn't involve creating new state jobs, simply relocating some of the existing ones, possibly to less costly accommodations. This could actually save the state money.

How many jobs are we talking about? That's a question that would require some research to accurately answer. Gov. Walz could propose a study of the state workforce which could offer recommendations on which government jobs could most effectively be relocated outside the metro area.

If, let's say, such a study found that 20 percent of state jobs currently located in the Twin Cities metro area could be effectively relocated to non-metro parts of the state. That's 4,200 stable, good-paying jobs with attractive benefits. Target those jobs to parts of the state, like the Iron Range, that have typically struggled economically, and you have the makings of an economic policy that would have a real and long-term impact.

We appreciate Gov. Walz's stated commitment to rural Minnesota. Bringing more state jobs to rural Minnesota is a great way to walk that talk.



Letters from Readers

You are not alone in your concern for our country's future

Dear Marshall,

I am writing to you this early Thursday morning as I sip my coffee and watch the dawn slip into the Minneapolis sky outside my kitchen window. I woke this morning reflecting on the editorial you wrote in the March 29 *Timberjay*— your editorial asking “Where are honor and integrity in America?”

I want to begin with, it is in you and the people who work with you to put out, each week, an amazing newspaper filled with thoughtful, well-researched articles that truly cover the news and details of the communities intermixed with the larger picture of the state and country that we also live in and cannot ethically ignore.

I am writing to thank you for your commitment to the endeavor of journalism, to the words you ponder and hone and share each week— be it a report of a local meeting, a cameo of a neighbor, the success of a student, the present and future of our water, our wildlife and our human life as we address the intensity and far reaching ramifications of the copper-nickel mining companies.

And you keep at it each week, and you share the stories of the birds, the flowers, the deer, and you write about and show the faces of kids on the front pages of both sections as they learn, and achieve, and experience joy and challenge in it all.

I am neither a Pollyanna nor a cynic, but I, too, can visit despair and I did as I read your editorial, and I was also lifted. So, I write to you today just because I want to let you know that you are not alone. There are others as I know you mentioned, others you know. But there are also the random others like myself who get up each morning and ponder what I can do today within my reach to live in and to support the American ideals I, too, was raised with, believed in and still do, and created within them a life in which I could

support true ideals and encourage others to do so as well.

So, I write to thank you. My partner, David, our dog, Bernie, and I have a place outside of Babbitt where we are moving permanently this year. I hope when that happens, I will have the opportunity to meet you, to shake your hand, to thank you in person. In the mean time I am sending you this letter.

**Ruth Katz
Minneapolis**

We can't abandon the fight to protect Lake Superior's watershed

I read with great interest Bob Tammen's letter to the editor in the recent *Timberjay*. Having met Bob a time or two in my decade or so involvement with the copper sulfide mine controversy, I was glad to hear that he thinks as I do about Tom Landwehr's new position with the Friends group. Personally, knowing and having interacted with many of Tom's new boosters, whom I think highly of, I was still perplexed and mostly angry about his new position.

Simply put: If there is anybody who has carried more water for PolyMet in particular and to a lesser degree, Twin Metals, I'm not exactly sure who it might be. The USFS shirked its responsibility for many, many years as far as enforcing their own regulations, to the point that long time employees who knew better claimed to be neutral, at various infomercials where I ran across them. They were certainly unwilling or more likely afraid to state the truth as they knew it about copper sulfide mining. While their captain firmly turned their ship around there was one person who never wavered in his support of copper sulfide mining, the recent DNR commissioner Tom Landwehr. Even after Gov. Mark Dayton was finally persuaded to change his stance, Tom Landwehr was unwavering in his insistence that this was inevitable and practically ordained by the state constitution. He said as much

in an MPR interview shortly after being named to his post in the Dayton administration. Since then all the rules, requirements, guarantees and financial sureties have all been molded to fit PolyMet's ability to move forward with a financially unviable project that is doomed to failure of every kind.

While I know and respect both Becky Rom and Steve Piragis, to whom we owe a lot, I beg to differ with their endorsement of Tom Landwehr. Both Bob Tammen (who never has been proven wrong) and Paula Maccabee are dead on. Abandoning the fight to save the Lake Superior watershed to save the BWCAW is a betrayal of all we should collectively stand for. What little is left of the great North Woods of my youth (aged 67 now) should be preserved from heavy industrial development based on short-term extraction with all the proceeds going to Chile. Oh, and one more thing, with the increasing automation sweeping the mining industry, the jobs will be nowhere what's promised, much less union.

Both of these projects need to be stopped dead in their tracks and held to the highest and most stringent standards that are applicable. Ely's future lies elsewhere.

**Mark Wendt
Stillwater**

Where the
North Country
Sounds Off!

We welcome
your letters

The *Timberjay* encourages letters to the editor. You can submit letters by mail at PO Box 636, Tower, MN 55790, or email letters to marshall@timberjay.com.

We ask that letters be limited to 300 words.

An old flame recently came a'calling

On press day, nobody expects to receive a phone call from an estranged lover.

Last Wednesday, I walked into the *Timberjay* and our office manager told me I'd received a call the day before from a man with a pleasant voice who wondered if Lynn O'Hara from Ely worked



**SCARLET LYNN
STONE**

there. She told him, “Yes she does and if you subscribed to our paper you'd be aware from her columns that she has changed her name to Scarlet Stone, and you could read about the new chapter of her life in Soudan.” She told him I would be in the office the

following day.

I wondered who was “troll-

ing” my way and after about five seconds made a silent guess. It had to be “D.T.” from the Hayward Lakes area...a hippie-carpenter-thing with interests in hydroponic gardening, cooking and smoking pot.

I figured the other exes are either dead or “in the know” on my whereabouts and what-ups! The phone call came in just before lunch, with five other sets of ears in the room (including Loki, the dog). I was hungry and ready to commune with my leftovers from Taco Tuesday;

Loki was too, but I took the call with a wry twist on my lips and an eyebrow raised.

He identified himself. I said, “I thought it may be you calling.”

I hadn't talked to D.T. for a few years and had no immediate reason to be rude. While my tacos beckoned from the other side of the mouse pad, he said, “The reason I had to call was to let you know about a couple things.” (Ya, what a line I thought.) He said, “First, is that our neighbor from down the road died.” (Well come on, I

thought, I barely knew the guy.) He rambled on about that for a time, we conversed, and then he added, “The next thing I had to tell you was this guy that used to live east of Winton moved down here and said he knew you. He called you BIG RED.”

He chuckled as if getting in a virgin-usage fat joke. I said, “Yup, BIG RED was a nickname from Ely.” I then made the mistake of offering the tidbit that my hair wasn't RED anymore,

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