**May 8, 2020** TIMBERJAY Newspapers

# OPINION

OF SPEECH, OR OF THE PRESS;" The First Amendment of the United States Constitution

"CONGRESS SHALL MAKE NO LAW... ABRIDGING THE FREEDOM

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# Editorial

# The business of EMS

Tower Council takes key first step in getting ambulance service back on track

The Tower City Council I took an important step forward when it approved the development of a business plan for the city-run ambulance service. It's critical information not just for the future financial success of the service, but to restore confidence among township officials in the department's leadership.

It's been a challenging period for the ambulance service as its expenses skyrocketed with the shift to paid on-call staffing. It appears last year's record number of runs helped the service post a modest profit margin in 2019 despite those higher costs, yet it's highly unlikely the service will achieve that number of runs this year. That was true even before the recent decision to halt non-emergency transfers for the time being. A decline in runs, in part related to the COVID-19 closures and stay-at-home orders, combined with the cost of paying for a new ambulance later this year, will almost certainly push the service's budget deeply into the red in 2020.

The business plan, which is expected to include a cost-of-service analysis, utilization rate analysis, a monthly profit and loss analysis, and a cash flow, should, for the first time, give city and ambulance officials a clear understanding of the financial status of the service as well as critical guidance for future decision-making. City officials, without question, should have demanded that kind of information before approving the shift to paid on-call staffing in 2017.

The financial impact of that change will certainly be a key component of the business planning effort. While we have not opposed the use of some paid on-call staffing, the approach adopted by the former ambulance

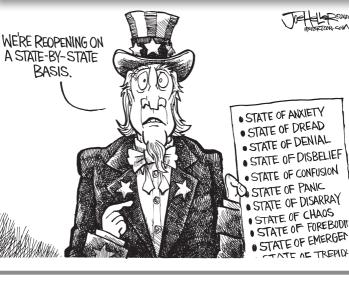
director was far more costly than necessary. Neighboring small ambulance services, like Cook and Orr, pay their paid on-call staff a modest stipend, around \$2-\$4 an hour, which is far less than Tower pays. The high wage paid by Tower is among the many reasons that the city would almost certainly lose a complaint under the Fair Labor Standards Act for failure to pay overtime.

The former city council approved the paid on-call staffing plan and pay scale based on promises made at the time that non-emergency transfers would easily cover the costs and generate even higher profits for the service than before. That never happened, largely because the non-emergency transfers proved to be not as lucrative as expected.

As a recent analysis by Tower Council Member Dave Setterberg revealed, those transfers generated about one-third the profits that had earlier been projected— and those profits disappear entirely once the depreciation cost on the ambulances is factored into the equation.

That's where business planning comes in. If private individuals want to risk their own money on ventures without doing the hard work of truly understanding their revenues and expenditures, that's their right to gamble. But when we're dealing with public funds and the future of a critical city service, there's no room for guesses or wildeyed optimism.

The good news is, there is still time to turn things around, but only if the city starts making well-informed decisions about the future direction of the ambulance service. Developing a solid business plan is the first critical step down that path.





# Letters from Readers

### A solution for the Greenwood cameras

In a letter to the *Timberjay* on May 1 concerning the cameras at the Greenwood Township office, Treasurer Rodgers ends it with: "I question why the clerk have [sp?] a problem with the camerasis she hiding something?" I suppose Rodgers will blame the Timberjay for the improper word usage. But she can't avoid the improper accusation against the clerk. It's ridiculous.

There are three cameras. One is outside of the office door and points down the sidewalk toward the highway. That's fine. Another is in the outer office, viewing the public computer, the outside entryway, and the door to the clerk-treasurer office. That's fine. The third is in the rectangular office that the clerk and treasurer share. It points at the clerk as she sits at her desk and covers the room including the backside of the treasurer as she sits at her desk at the opposite end of the office. That being described, I believe that there is a simple solution that will make everyone happy and still provide more than enough "security". I feel the same as Clerk Sue Drobac does, in that I wouldn't want to have a closeup camera constantly surveilling me

while I am working at my desk and possibly being transmitted to township supervisors' homes, as has been mentioned. I suggest that the office camera be refocused to exclude viewing the clerk working at her desk. Most folks will agree with that. The camera can still view the rest of the office, including the treasurer if that's her preference.

Finally, if there is a true concern for the clerk and treasurer's security and physical well-being, include a provision in next year's budget to fund an alarm system which would include strategically placed alarm buttons that would immediately alert the County 911 system of an emergency situation taking place at the Town Hall. That would be more likely to save a life or prevent injury as opposed to recording the daily

Lee Peterson **Greenwood Twp** 

### If the board has concerns they should express them openly

Surveillance cameras. That's what they are, contrary to the Greenwood Township Treasurer's description of them as security cameras. They are not connected to a 24-hour manned remote monitoring site, and there is no panic button which could contact police should the clerk be attacked. The cameras simply record video which, at a later date. could assist in the apprehension of a criminal and that in itself defines a surveillance system.

The board's discussion on buying a camera system was focused on protecting the clerk/ treasurer, but thinly veiled their intent borne out by their actions to surveil and intimidate the clerk. If the board thinks the clerk has something to hide, as Treasurer Rodgers suggests, then stop being mealy-mouthed and state the assertion openly.

Clerk Drobac was recently described by one of our township's citizens as being "Minnesota Nice". I think it will be a long time before we hear such an unsolicited description for any of the other board members, including the treasurer.

JoAnn Bassing **Greenwood Twp** 

### Short and sweet

In response to last week's letter from Pam Rodgers... Really???

Sue Drobac **Elected Greenwood Township Clerk** 

**COMMENTARY** 

# Reasons for hope in a dark time

We are living in a difficult time. Our country and its communities are deeply

polarized; many Americans distrust one another as well as the government and other institutions. The novel coronavirus has deepened our problems in a way none of us imagined.

The number of Americans who have contracted COVID-19 has surpassed a million. Tens of

thousands have died, and record numbers have lost their jobs. No wonder, then, people are disheartened, even discouraged.

things. After successfully getting our onions in the ground last

weekend, our eyes were now

on the prize — peas and spinach

planted before the "forty days

and forty nights" of rain, like

This is a stressful and challenging period, when we and our representative democracy are being tested.

But there are reasons to be hopeful. I think of a speech the Rev. Jesse Jackson gave with the theme of "keep hope alive," and that's what we must do. Hope is a precious commodity in human endeavors, including government and politics. We need it now as

much as ever.

What gives us hope today? First, the United States remains the world's preeminent power.

We may not stand astride the world as we once did, but we are still a global leader. People in other nations look to us for leadership. I've experienced this scores of times, in international meetings where delegates looked

to see what the U.S. would do. The fundamentals of the U.S. economy are strong. After recovering from the 2007-08 recession, we experienced a remarkable period of economic growth. The pandemic has brought a setback, of course, but there is strength and growing vitality in America.

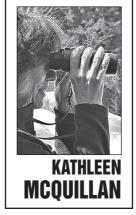
Even with all our problems, a strong strain of optimism is part

See HOPE...pg. 5

# Mining deep in the time of pandemic

One of the delightful benefits of the social lockdown is that I'm periodically having longer phone conversations with my children. This week I received a call from my older son. It came after a busy day in the garden. John and I had spent the last few days hauling cow manure

and decomposing straw from my



neighbor's farm. We do this every year in a long-standing bartering arrangement that has proven to be a valuable part of the household budget our home-grown food supply.

As may be the case for others, manure and straw are key components for keeping our gumbo clay soil

rich and tillable for growing

those that have set us back the past two springs on our gardening timeline. It was a long day of spreading, tilling, tilling again, and tilling one more time to break down our homemade compost and thoroughly mix it in. Aah! The perfect seedbed, fertile and ready to deliver abundantly. Around seven o'clock, after

indulging in a simple meal and straightening up the kitchen, I sat myself down for some quiet time checking Duffy for ticks. His hair has grown considerably these past four months and he's become a magnet for "phoophoos" — things like burrs, sticks and yes, ticks. An hour combing through his gnarly locks has become part of our nightly ritual. The phone's ring startled me. But what a joy to hear my son's voice. He phones less often now since being called back to work the afternoon shift. He brought

me up to date on family life in "old" Mountain Iron. They too have been preparing their little garden spot, a source of happiness and inspiration. According to Nick, "mostly Bobbi's thing." But believe me, it's much much more than Bobbi's "thing". It's her work of art!

We went on to discuss the joys and challenges of homeschooling a 14-year-old, trying to decipher "virtual" lectures and assignments prepared by teach-

See PANDEMIC...pg. 5

#### Paid Letter to the Editor

# Leave Eveleth-Gilbert out of Virginia's consolidation plan

To the Editor:

I am a taxpaying citizen in the Eveleth-Gilbert School District. For over two years now the Mesabi Daily News has catered to the Eveleth-Gilbert/Virginia Collaboration/ Consolidation propaganda. These full-page ads are supposedly full of "FACTS". The Fact is this information is NOT

Who is paying for this propaganda and why won't the Mesabi Daily News print letters to the editor with opposing views?

Dr. Schmidt's latest "Guest Column" again warns of "Skullduggery".

Definition: Underhanded or Unscrupulous Behavior.

Nowhere in that definition does it say "someone else's opinion"!

Fact: There were several bids written up over the years to determine what needed to be fixed in the Eveleth-Gilbert Schools and how much it would cost. In the end, a bid was given to Kraus/Anderson who promised they could offer "more" for the money.

Kraus/Anderson works VERY closely with the IRRB. The Iron Range's savings account. The IRRB was organized to collect tax dollars from the taconite companies for economic development and city projects because of the cyclical nature of the mining industry. Apparently, the IRRB and Kraus/Anderson now want this fund to be used for the economic demise of the Iron Range.

FACT: IRRB Commissioner Mark Phillips was formerly employed by Kraus/Anderson. Tom Bakk's son-in-law is currently employed by Kraus/Anderson. what happens, Kraus/Anderson will take their cut off the top and I mean millions. Dr. Schmidt please tell the people how much Kraus/Anderson will be paid.

Dr. Schmidt asks if residents want to cooperate together and consolidate all their services and systems; or do they want to keep some of the alliances and allegiances the same as before World War I. WHAT IS THAT?

Dr. Schmidt, no one knows what you're talking about because in your quest for a better education, World War I AND World War II were never taught. The grandchildren and great-grandchildren of the Greatest Generation do not have a clue about how Germany used propaganda, burned books and gassed millions of innocent people to try and take over the

FACT: There were election violations in the May 2019 election found after an investigation by the St. Louis County Attorney.

FACT: Neither Superintendent notified the board members or the public in any public meetings.

FACT: There was a violation in the proposal sent to the Commissioner of Education. This was reviewed by the Legislative Auditor.

FACT: The schools still DO NOT have a SITE. They have purchased (how many) millions of dollars of land? It was not stated in your proposal to the Comm of Ed to buy land and EVICT an established Charter School.

FACT: "Our kids need 21st Century Education." What is that EXACTLY?

And if you know, then

why did you send teachers to Colorado and Wyoming three times to figure out how to teach? The teachers don't know what is expected of them, but they know they need bigger rooms. FACT: Dr. Schmidt you

insist that Eveleth-Gilbert and Virginia need to get along, HOWEVER, YOU, YOURSELF are creating a very hostile environment not only between cities, but between neighbors and FAMILIES.

FACT: John Huenink, K/A, came to the Eveleth-Gilbert board meeting and stated that if the board did not sign the "intent to consolidate" paperwork that they were just handed, Virginia would MAKE ALL THE DECISIONS!

Sounds like a threat...

FACT: Dr. Schmidt you keep insisting that the districts will "need more money" if not consolidated. Have you told the public of your plans to hire 32 ADDITIONAL ADMINISTRATORS? Have you told the public HOW MUCH YOUR SALARY WILL BE? Have you told the public that Supt Jeff Carey will be in charge of overseeing the project? Sounds like a job for an engineer...

So, when Kraus/Anderson packs up and moves on to the next victim, with the blessing of the IRRB; will the crumbling walls, and shattered windows be Mr. Carey's responsibility? Kraus/Anderson took NO liability in the "new county schools crumbling." Their main function is to get paid a lot of money for "a positive outcome for a vote", setting up phone trees, setting up Facebook to bash people, brainwash the weak and identify the opposition. Look at the positive outcome

gained in creating the new Miner's Memorial Complex. Yes, Kraus/Anderson was the master of that project too. Now, because of the economy and the Virus, Virginia is broke. Will this "OUT OF TOWN" company come back and help?

FACT: Ehlers Corp (the Bond People) did provide a booklet of outcomes and one of the pages stated that "if the STATE and IRRB are unable to fulfill their obligations, the burden will fall on the taxpayers." OOPS! Lucky me, my home value would increase.

"Sadly, rumors will be started." YOU have been printing outright lies and covering up data for years! "Inundating residents with false information at the last minute before the vote". Even creating an almost IMPOSSIBLE voting situation in Eveleth in 2019.

Dr. Schmidt you are correct. YOU are using people's worst fears against them. YOU came from outside the Range, YOU hired people (K/A) to come to the Range to "deliberately and intentionally destroy local communities by working in the shadows with last-minute fabrications and misleading data." Then, after they are gone, a 'community is in tatters."

NO, WEREALLY DON'T WANT YOU OR ANYONE ELSE FROM OUTSIDE THE RANGE TO DECIDE OUR

HOW DARE YOU refer to anyone you don't personally know as ideological anti-public school, anti-government and anti-career academies follow-

Dr. Schmidt, there is a vocational technical school in the area that is designed specifically for "academy style"

proud of the Mesabi Range College.

Dr. Schmidt how do you know there is no "other plan". You and Mr. Carey don't allow FREEDOM OF SPEECH at board meetings without being cut off. YOU don't allow the Mesabi Daily News to print any thought-provoking articles on the subject.

Dr. Schmidt it's time for YOU "to bury the hatchet". Eveleth-Gilbert and Virginia were getting along just fine till you strolled in!

Tell the truth, just this once, the Virginia High School is falling down. It was twelve years ago, but because your district has a severe spending problem, all of the levying and re-levying still couldn't put a new roof on the building. Virginia had no other option than to tap into Eveleth-Gilbert tax dollars.

They tried this trick in 2013 with Mt. Iron-Buhl and Eveleth-Gilbert, but sadly Kraus/Anderson wasn't there to go for the jugular. Ask Tim Riordon, he tried as hard as he could!

Take your referendum money, that the Virginia residents voted on, and build your castle. But leave Eveleth-Gilbert out of it!

The best thing we can teach our children and grandchildren is how to live within their means and beware of an outsider with a "once in a lifetime" (80-percent free money) deal that's too good to be true!

Shame on you and shame on your hostile little lambs!

Sally Zamlen **Eveleth** 

### PANDEMIC...Continued from page 4

ers unaccustomed to the novel method informing and motivating students from home. My son provided an inside glimpse of the experience, "a mixed bag of failures and breakthroughs".

I can't recall the exact course of rapids and eddies that carried us down our thought stream, eventually getting us on this topic of "failure" and "success", but somehow that's where we landed. After diving deep into Nick's recollections of being a high school student, identifying which teachers held his attention, transferred knowledge effectively, and laid the groundwork for his current appreciation for history and math, he

also identified those who hadn't. "I regret that I didn't pay more attention in English class. Times when I really want to send a clear, well-constructed text using the right grammar so the other person gets my point. That's when I wish I'd taken Mr. Bartovich more seriously." I had to laugh. I recalled all those times Mr. Bartovich met me in the principal's office because Nick wasn't taking him "more seriously". We agreed, some teachers really were special. True successes at their jobs!

Nick then shared a recent conversation he'd had with an older man he knew well. It was about the question of how to define "success". The

man was doubting some of the choices he'd made during the course of his life, and also some he'd "failed" to make. He began comparing himself to his siblings, a sister who was an accomplished and somewhat "driven" physician, and his brother, a successful businessman who lived "the high life". Nick walked me through the man's self-examination - not passing judgment, just highlighting certain aspects he thought were worth discussing. The man said the doctor often worked eighty hours a week, relying on nannies to help raise her children. Nick queried the man, "How often does she see them now, since they've left home?" The man

replied, "Not that often." Nick continued, "And the brother who's the high-roller entrepreneur? You told me his main goal was making lots of money, and proving that he knew more about everything than anybody else? Is he a person you've enjoyed hanging around with?" The man answered, "Well, not really." Nick summed up his thoughts. "Then maybe their lives aren't all that great."

I listened, reflecting on my own life. I chimed in. "Ya know, I've asked myself those same questions.... Maybe we all do sometimes." "Yea," Nick responded. "You're probably right."

We agreed that comparing ourselves to others

ing feature of American

life. With the internet, all

Americans have access

usually leads us down a rabbit hole — unless we stop and ask ourselves, "How do we measure "success"? Is it how much money you make or status you acquire? Is it what we produce... Something we have to "show" for our lives? Who's defining success and setting the standard?"

Then Nick asked, "So, if we are brave — or crazy — enough to go our own way, aren't we all just trying to be happy?" With that, there was a long pause in the conversation.

At this point, Duffy had been thoroughly inspected. While traveling to the "outer limits" and back, I had discovered two ticks, shooed away the bunny that's been

governors and mayors

have stepped up to lead.

And it's not just govern-

chewing my porch, and finished two cups of tea. I asked Nick, "Hey, what time is it, anyway?" I was shocked when he said 1 a.m. With no clock in the room, we had mined below the surface for three hours. We are two people who have chosen our own paths, and for the most part, we're happy! Not all the time, of course. But enough to know that joy and satisfaction might be the best measures of success around!

With that, we shared thanks for our marathon chat, then wrapped it up with a sweet "Good

### **HOPE...**Continued from page 4

of the national character. We may not agree about politics, our leaders or the direction of our country, but dig beneath the surface and most Americans are appreciative of our history and proud to be Americans. They do not want to trade places with the citizens of any other country.

Moreover, Americans are talented and resilient.

this country many times, and I've met with countless groups and individuals; and in those meetings I've been repeatedly impressed with the wealth of talented people I've encountered. You find them in all walks

labor, and the worlds of I've traveled across sports, arts and culture. In unexpected settings, I've met knowledgeable citizens who can argue the

because he initially had

of life: academia, business,

finer points of domestic

politics and foreign policy.

and deliberation on issues

of public concern is a defin-

Energetic discussion

Louis County.

of federalism is again showing its strength. In the current public health crisis,

ment where this occurs: to vast amounts of inforindividuals and commumation about topics that interest them, and they use nity groups of all kinds, public and private, are that information skillfully. Finally, our system meeting our challenges. Progress is never linear, and the COVID-

19 pandemic reminds us

that there will always be setbacks. But they will not override our hopes and

Nearly two hundred years ago, de Tocqueville wrote that Americans had "a lively faith in the perfectibility of man." That faith may be tested, but it endures.

### TIDY-UP...Continued from page 3

really was some civic pride shown."

Kringstad estimated the Tower volunteers made at least 30 trips to the canister site, plus additional trips to the city's brush pile.

Charlie Carlson, co-owner of Ubetcha

Antiques, made good use of his time off due to his store being closed to make 11 trips to the Soudan canister site.

"We got a lot of stuff,"

Kringstad said there was some confusion been told they were allowed to bring construction-type debris to the canister site with their special clean-up days permit issued by St.

"We did end up buying punch tickets for some

of the stuff we picked up which wasn't permitted for free," he said.

But overall, Kringstad said his volunteer crew, which included Kevin Norby, Tim Mickle, Dave Broten and Lynn Scott, along with city mainte-

nance and office staff, did a great job wrangling with all that had been left for pick-up, and the crew all planned to be back helping out on the second clean-up day on May 6.

The city is still looking into options for residents

who would like to get old vehicles towed away.

The next step, Kringstad said, would be getting a group of volunteers to pick up trash along the city's bike trails and other roadsides and alleys.

### **COUNCIL...**Continued from page 3

"We will have people directing folks to put (their materials) in a pile," he added. "We had folks up there just recently who dumped a pile right in the middle of the road. I don't

know why they can't seem to understand that there is a pile to (add to)."

Brush and grass clippings are also accepted at the St. Louis County transfer station located off Highway 21, about halfway to Babbitt. "They also take old

lawn furniture and other garbage, so that option is there," Langowski said. "We will give this a try for

May and June and look at expanding (hours of operation) after that," he said. Hopefully this COVID-19 will change and allow us to adjust to what we are envisioning."

Langowski reinforced that users should drive slowly on the gravel road at the site. Any complaints from residents will surely shut down the city service, Langowski warned.

In a related matter, the annual city-wide cleanup is likely to be put on the shelf this year due to the coronavirus. The city's sanitation committee remains silent on the issue.