

Viewpoint

Intense special session leads to solid state budget

Editorially, our newspapers have previously called for more prompt attention to the most important work of the 92nd meeting of our Minnesota Legislature — adoption of a two-year state budget that began July 1, 2021.

Minnesota's divided government — Republican Majority Leader Paul Gazelka leading the Senate and DFLer Melissa Hortman as Speaker of the House — made a budget agreement with Gov. Tim Walz, a DFLer, prior to the House adjourning on June 30. The Republican Senate delayed adjournment for a few days to consider several of Walz's appointees who have not yet been confirmed by the State Senate.

By failing to meet the first budget deadline during the regular session on May 17, attention focused once again on a special session that Walz

“While six weeks late, the \$52 billion budget represents some important bipartisan progress.”

convened on June 14. The impending July 1 threat of a partial state government shutdown inspired the DFL House and GOP Senate to finish their work.

While six weeks late, the \$52 billion budget represents some important bipartisan progress. A record \$2.4 billion is now projected to be in the “rainy day fund” beginning a year from now. Current tax collections are roughly \$1.8 billion higher than projected.

A tax reduction of \$1 billion will be spread over the next four years. There are no new taxes in the final budget.

K-12 education funding will increase by \$1.2 billion, the single largest increase in 15 years. There will also be more money for recruiting teachers of color and funding for suicide preven-

tion programs. Higher education institutions will get a \$100 million increase overall; the University of Minnesota will receive nearly \$39 million more.

Minnesota will spend more than \$16.5 billion on state health programs and other social services, not including federal money that passes through the state's coffers. The budget bill provides more funding to make child care affordable, new money to help people live independently, more pay for personal care assistants as well as increased aid to lower income residents. The state's reinsurance program will receive \$130 million more; reinsurance helps insurance companies afford the claims of their costliest patients, which in turn keeps rates on the individual market down.

Walz and legislative leaders debated a 2021 bonding bill, but no deal was made. The Legislature may pass a bonding bill this fall in special session or will pass a major bonding bill in 2022 prior to the next election.

Walz has applauded the budget, stating “the work of recovery begins.”

Progress has been made, of course, on other policy issues that are driven by budget decisions. Among them:

Beginning July 1, Walz's 16 months of emergency powers ended. This had allowed the governor to make unilateral decisions largely regarding spending of the COVID dollars sent to the state. Eliminating the practice was a top priority of Republicans.

Public safety policy includes

(Continued on Page 5A)

Impacting lives is why we continue to do this work

By NICOLE KERN
Guest Columnist

One of the most frequently asked questions when someone hears that we work for Community Corrections/Probation is, “How can you work with people who should be in jail or prison?” The second question is “How do you not just give up on those people?”

The people who are placed on probation are our neighbors, prior classmates, people we see in grocery store or at the gas station. The people on probation are a part of our community.

People who end up on probation may have made a momentary poor decision or they may be struggling with an addiction or a trauma from when they were young which is causing them to make a series of bad decisions.

Our job is to hold them accountable but also to help them figure out how to turn things around. We do this by listening to them and helping them to identify areas in their life that they may need to make some changes. We

also do this by holding them accountable when they start to slip up.

Years ago, probation was a punitive sentence and the immediate answer to any violation was always jail or prison. While that served a purpose at that time, it typically did not help folks make long lasting changes and it was costly for taxpayers.

Probation now focuses on finding realistic changes that people can make to become productive members of our community. Sometimes that means finding employment with a living wage, completing local programming such as chemical dependency or mental health counseling. And sometimes it

means having someone who can help you learn to make a budget so you can pay your bills instead of stealing; someone you can reach out to when you want to give up and return to using drugs; or someone that may put you in jail for a few days but will also come there and help you make a plan to

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When a legislator's eligibility comes into question

When I was covering politics full-time, 42 years ago, one of the more significant stories on which I reported was the ouster of GOP Rep. Bob Pavlak from the Legislature.

In 1978, Minnesotans elected a state House of Representatives comprised of 67 DFLers and 67 Independent-Republicans. The DFL saw a way to break the tie in Pavlak's race.

Pavlak, a St. Paul Police sergeant, had defeated incumbent DFL Rep. Arnold Kempe by only 321 votes. A few days before the election, the St. Paul Dispatch had published an erroneous editorial critical of Kempe's lack of attendance. The newspaper had received from Pavlak's campaign the information it used in the editorial. The information was accurate, but the editorialist misinterpreted it, creating the error.

The critical sin was that Pavlak supporters then distributed 1,800 photocopies of the erroneous editorial throughout the district. The DFL went to court, but the district court judge ruled against it. The matter was then appealed to the Minnesota Supreme Court. With only a week left in the legislative session, the High Court ruled that Pavlak's action was “deliberate, serious and material” under Minnesota's fair campaign laws, but cited the state Constitution's Article IV, Section 6, which says that the House and the Senate shall be the judge of the eligibility of its own members.

Pavlak, who maintained his innocence to his death, was not allowed to vote on his own eligibility, and he was ousted on a straight party-line vote, 67-66.

That brings us today to the strange case of Rep. John Thompson, DFL-St. Paul. Ironically, although the boundaries have changed through the decades, Pavlak represented District 67A as does Thompson. Perhaps the similarity ends there, but Thompson's eligibility to serve is also in question.

It became an issue when Thompson was stopped July 4 for

West Words

by
Tom West
Former
Editor/
General
Manager



a minor traffic violation. His car had no front license plate. When the officer asked him for his driver's license, Thompson produced a Wisconsin license.

Minnesota law states that if you move here from another state, you have 60 days to turn in your old license and get a Minnesota license. Thompson says he has lived in the district for 18 years, but the state says he has never had a Minnesota driver's license. He renewed the Wisconsin license in 2005, 2012 and in November 2020, the same month he was elected to the Minnesota House.

So where does he live? When he filed his affidavit of candidacy, he listed only a St. Paul post office box.

During the traffic stop, he allegedly gave a Blair Avenue address that is outside 67A. The state Constitution requires that all legislators live within the districts they serve for at least six months before being elected. The StarTribune reported, Thompson had his Minnesota driving privileges revoked in 2019 because of unpaid child support. Thompson resolved the child-support issue and his driving privileges were reinstated July 7.

Thompson immediately called the stop “pretextual.” He said “We're still getting driving-while-Black tickets in this state.”

St. Paul Police Chief Todd Axtell said the stop was “by the books” and demanded an apology. Thompson responded, “The issue is we need to rewrite the book.”

Maybe, but the issue at hand is one of lawfulness. Minnesota is one of 30 states that requires a front license plate. At some point, the Legislature thought this was a good idea and made it a law, not

a pretext.

The issue is not even about the merits of front license plates. Thompson, serving in the Legislature, is in a better position than almost all Minnesotans to get changed any law he doesn't like. However, if a legislator thinks existing state laws should be ignored, that's a game changer.

As it was, Thompson was in front of the microphones after the Legislature passed its second police reform bill in as many years. He complained that the changes did not go far enough. Among his proposed changes, he wants to shorten the time delay in releasing police body cam footage, but it took nine days and considerable urging by others before he gave that permission, as required by law.

Thompson also has been a leader in bringing protests and demonstrations to the front yards of public officials' homes. He was one of the speakers in a video that went viral last summer in front of the Hugo home of former Minneapolis Police Union executive Bob Kroll. The video shows Thompson beating effigies of Kroll and his wife.

And yet, when he filed his affidavit of candidacy last year, Thompson listed only a post office box as his address. Demonstrations in front of public officials' homes can be intimidating to their families; it got so bad in front of Hennepin County Attorney Mike Freeman's home last summer, that Freeman moved. One would think if Thompson does, indeed, live in Minnesota, he would at least have the courage to list his own address publicly.

The House of Representatives may have grounds to remove Thompson from office. It needs to hold hearings to determine not only his legal residence, but where he voted in the last several elections and how he proved he lived in the district. Having House members who don't live by the rule of law or who may be ineligible because they live outside the district they represent brings dishonor on and hurts the legitimacy of the entire body.

Tom West, now retired, is the former general manager of this paper. Reach him at westwords.mcr@gmail.com.

Letters to the Editor

Response to story on legislative update

To the Editor:

Coverage of the majority leader and state representative reviewing the legislative session was excellent, thanks to Zach Hacker and *The Record* (July 4).

At the event, a Franciscan nun asked, “Why hadn't the legislators encouraged more people to be vaccinated?” The answer was under-

whelming. Yes, getting vaccinated is a personal choice, but as leaders in our state, it is important to provide accurate information and encourage people to do the right thing, not only for themselves, but their family and community.

The mRNA vaccines have been tested based on technology starting in the 1990s. It does not replace or tamper with your genes. It has been used in other therapies for years and only required minimal tweaking to work against

COVID-19. Finally, since it uses proteins that are already in your system, there is less chance of long term effects and immune deficiency problems than virus based vaccines.

It is time to step up senator and representative to promote the use of the COVID vaccines. Getting vaccinated will give everyone a higher probability of a long healthy life. — **A. John Peters, Browerville**

Online Poll

Do you feel the Legislature should address the issue with Rep. Thompson?

1. Absolutely — it needs to be known if he's even eligible to be a state rep.
2. No, the Legislature should let it play out in the legal system.
3. I hope at least there's a thorough investigation and isn't just let go.

Last week's poll results

Did you see fireworks over the Fourth?
50.0% - Yes, but not by choice - people were shooting them off all over - even in town.
26.1% - No, but I didn't go looking for them
23.9% - With the dry weather, I was hoping fireworks would be put on hold.



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The Record welcomes letters

The Morrison County Record invites readers to contribute letters to the editor. E-mail letters are preferred to mcr@apgecm.com. Letters should be no more than 200 words and Thank You's should be no more than 75 words in length. Letters containing libelous material, or those intended as advertising will be refused. All letters must include a signature, address and a daytime telephone number. Deadline for letters is Wednesday at 5 p.m. Letter writers are limited to one letter every 5 weeks.

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Viewpoint

Letters to the Editor

Iowa Boy Scouts grateful for MN Nice

To the Editor:
Troop 33 Boy Scouts were traveling from Camp Many Point July 3. Our 15-passenger van broke down in Staples. We thought the problem was fixed, took off and then broke down outside of Randall.

We were stranded along the highway and State Patrol Sgt. Anderson stopped to help. He made several calls and dispatch made calls also trying to find us a rental and get the van towed. There were no rental companies open. They were able to get someone to tow the van to Cushing.

He was able to get two deputies to help bring our boys and adults to Perkins in Little Falls. We were stranded there for seven hours until another van from Centerville, Iowa could come get us.

A shout out to Hollie Tewey and staff at Perkins. We appreciated having a place to stay for seven hours and the two lady customers who purchased 16 muffins for us.

A shout out to Sgt. Anderson and the deputies that helped us. We left Little Falls at 9 p.m. Saturday night to arrive home at 5 a.m. Sunday morning.

You have a very friendly staff at Perkins, helpful patrolmen and very nice people in your community. — **Mona Berry and Troop 33 Boy Scouts, Centerville, Iowa**

Governor's powers must be addressed

To the Editor:
Governor Tim Walz reveled in the dictatorial powers he gained during

Why we continue to do this work

(Continued from Page 4A)
avoid making the same mistake again.

Minnesota has one of the lowest prison incarceration populations in the nation which has saved taxpayers statewide money, but it also means that we have some of the highest rates of people on probation in the community statewide. We work with people in the community where they live and help them to find a way to make better choices and get the help that they need. If our efforts fail and we exhaust

the COVID-19 pandemic after activating Minnesota's emergency powers law, wherein he continuously demonstrated he preferred dictatorship over democracy.

Walz was "drunk with power" as he issued continuous dictatorial "executive orders," which catastrophically damaged and destroyed people and pillars of society, like small businesses, in the name of fighting COVID-19, simultaneously funneling dictatorial power and profit to giant corporations.

Minnesota's mayors and city councils also gained dictatorial emergency powers concurrent with Walz's emergency powers.

Necessary for continuing Walz's "dictator bliss" were several top elected state officials, including Attorney General Keith Ellison (all Democrat) and Democrats in Minnesota's legislature, whose consents were needed to continue Walz's 15 1/2-month emergency powers — all clearly indicating they also preferred dictatorship over democracy or couldn't understand the difference and, therefore, must never be re-elected.

It's absolutely crucial we examine the degree the previously-designated enforcers of Walz's dictatorial COVID-19 restrictions like giant corporations, seek to continue to add to their previously-conferred authoritarian powers, like continuously extending requirements for masking, social distancing, gatherings, COVID-19 tests, self-quarantining, vaccinations, etc., which target Minnesotans as employees, customers, patients, older people, vulnerable adults, renters, college students, etc. — **Donna Christianson, St. Cloud**

local options, jail or prison then becomes our only choice.

At some point in life, we have all come to a fork in the road and had to decide how to move forward. If we are lucky enough to not have trauma or addiction clouding our judgment, we will hopefully make the right choice. But if we make the wrong choice and end up on probation, hopefully the people overseeing our case believe that we need to be both held accountable and helped at the same time.

Nicole Kern is the director of Community Corrections in Morrison County.

Drought or climate change, farmers are land stewards

By **BRUCE SHULTZ**
Guest Columnist

We finished haying this year on July 4. That may not sound like news to most people, but as a farmer and rancher in Raynesford, Montana, producers in our area usually don't even start preparing to get into the fields until after Independence Day.

With extreme drought hammering the whole region, we actually began haying as soon as I returned to my ranch from the National Farmers Organization national board meeting in Iowa on June 25. I stepped off the plane and drove home, then started cutting two hours after walking through the farmhouse door.

My wife, Wendy, had already made test cuts in a neighbor's fields that we have been haying the last few years on a share system. After driving around neighboring fields, she telephoned them and told them to just graze it. While we cut most of our fields, we left patches that were in horrible condition. Overall, we got about a third of what we need. The problem is, the state of Montana is in bad shape.

The entire West and North Dakota and South Dakota, are rated from abnormally dry to experiencing extreme drought conditions.

This got me thinking about how our climate seems to be changing, and not for the better. Most of U.S. agricultural land is either under drought conditions, or as in the Gulf Coast — extremely wet or flooding. There don't seem to be many places that are rated normal this year.

While I was swathing hay, I listened to an interview on public radio with Rep. John Curtis, R-Utah. He is spearheading a GOP-only climate caucus. Curtis mentioned that climate can be a divisive term, but if you ask people about being a good steward of the earth, that's a phrase everyone approves.

Curtis' goal is to work with Republican members who are on the fence about climate issues and the role government should play. I

hope GOP caucus members understand the issue is real and farmers are a major piece in solving the climate dilemma puzzle.

I applaud the efforts targeting climate in the nation's capitol. There is real bipartisan legislation work happening. The House and Senate

have caucuses addressing climate change. The Senate climate caucus is comprised of seven Republicans, six Democrats and one Independent. The House has 41 Democrats and 23 Republicans addressing climate. While they may not agree on everything, legislation is moving forward through compromise and listening to ideas from one another.

The best example is Senate Bill 1251, the Growing Climate Solutions Act. The GCSA passed the Senate last month 92-8. It should easily pass the House. This has been touted as a major step in reducing America's

greenhouse gases. The carbon credit market can easily be described as the Wild West. This bill works toward making sense of that market. The GCSA does two things: It gives technical assistance to farmers, ranchers and private forested land owners about ways to lower their GHGs or enhance their ability to capture carbon; second, it creates protocols for third-party verifiers.

The GCSA, along with USDA's push to increase Conservation Reserve Program land to 25 million acres, is proof that agriculture is a major part of the solution regarding climate issues. We will have the opportunity to help improve soil conditions, make a bit more income and, as Curtis noted, to be good stewards of the earth. Indeed, family farms and ranches are the best stewards of the land. Our goal is to pass the land to the next generation of agricultural producers.

Bruce Shultz is vice president of the National Farmers Organization. He and his wife, Wendy, operate a cow/calf ranch in Raynesford, Montana.

Intense special session

(Continued from Page 4A)
new regulations on "no knock" warrants and improved jail safety practices, transparency regarding data tracking of officer misconduct, stronger body camera regulations for police and greater use of mental health specialists during 911 calls. Police will no longer be required to arrest a person for missing a court date and other lower-level infractions.

Minnesota's road construction season will proceed on schedule this year after lawmakers passed last October a \$7.27 billion bill to fund transportation projects for the next two years.

The Jobs and Economic Development bill includes \$70 million in new funding for border-to-border broadband infrastructure. The money will come from the federal stimulus bill and will help Minnesotans across the state with poor internet access. Minnesota aims to provide broadband at 100 megabits per second download and 20 mbps upload by 2026.

Walz's 15-month moratorium on rental housing evictions will be phased out over the next 11 months un-

der a \$115 million housing budget bill. The bill provides an "off ramp" to the eviction ban; landlords must now give renters a 15-day notice. The budget bill provides \$100 million in housing infrastructure bonds, plus \$18.33 million to build single-family homes and \$15 million for manufactured home park acquisition and improvements.

These final pieces of legislation were forged with extensive compromise between the two parties and represent a solid footing for the coming biennium. While we continue to urge the legislators to strive to meet their budget deadline, we congratulate our lawmakers for their diligence in keeping the state's lights on and working toward a better tomorrow.

— An editorial from the APG of East Central Minnesota Editorial Board. Reactions are welcome. Send to: editorial.board@apgem.com.



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Sincere thanks
to Great River Arts (GRA) for the opportunities and excellent support you offer to the many artists in our area. A special thanks to Michelle Kiley for her welcoming kindness, encouragement and dedication to the artists, many of whom look forward to displaying their work on the walls and pedestals of the gallery. Thank you, Michelle, for your support, and the extra hours you have devoted to GRA to get everything just right and always with a genuine, positive attitude. The July 10th reception for the artists in the 2021 Juried Show was a delightful event. Thank you to all those involved in the tremendous process of making the show a success for the artists and patrons of the arts. Thank you, *Bev Gold*

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