

ANSWERMAN

# Why doesn't OT at Capitol include a penalty?

**Please explain why our state legislators receive more pay when they don't get their work done on time and "need" to go into a special session? Wouldn't they have more incentive if they were penalized each day instead. I'd do the same, too, if I got rewarded, wouldn't you? — Thanks, Disgusted Taxpayer.**

Yes, I would. I love money. And if I were a state legislator and faced with the prospect of getting penalized financially for not getting my work done, boy, would I work harder.

But here's the question: Do we really want that sort in the Legislature? Because if money were the missing ingredient here, it begs the question: Are we sending the right people to St. Paul? Do we really want state politicians to be motivated by an extra buck? And if money did push them to shift into another gear, would the public really get a better product?

And once we've installed that type of person in St. Paul, why wouldn't an envelope of dollars, discretely pushed across a legislator's desk, help

him or her make up their mind on how to vote?

"I don't think people would necessarily want us to make decisions based on whether or not I'm going to get per diem tomorrow," said state Sen. Dave Senjem, a Republican from Rochester. "I don't think people would want that either."

Want to know how to cure my-dog-ate-the-homework problem? Cure the partisan divide. Send one party or the other to St. Paul. But Minnesota isn't prepared to do that. So as long as we keep filling the state rowboat

with one group that wants to paddle one way and another that wants to paddle the other, we're going to fishtail at times.

I say this ever so gently. Maybe we cut our legislators some slack. It's been an extraordinary last couple of years. We've had a pandemic, the killing of George Floyd, a lot of social unrest. Legislators have been social distancing, holding committee meetings via Zoom and staring at miniscule numbers and spreadsheets on their computer screens.

Here's a fun fact: Minnesota

has had to hold special sessions to pass seven of their biennial budgets in the last 20 years. And in all seven years — 2001, 2003, 2005, 2011, 2015, 2017 and 2019 — Minnesota had divided government. There was only one session when one party, the DFL, held the governorship and controlled both legislative chambers in that timeframe.

And, guess what? They got their work done on time.

Send questions for the Answer Man to [answerman@postbulletin.com](mailto:answerman@postbulletin.com).

# Why you didn't see Post Bulletin footage of a suicide attempt

**EDITORS NOTE:** *The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline toll-free hotline is available 24/7 at 1-800-273-8255.*



**JEFF PIETERS**

The man in the red T-shirt dangled over the railing of the bridge above U.S. Highway 52 near Apache Mall. Traffic backed up for at least a mile in both directions. It was a tense scene. The man's bicycle smashed to the pavement below before Rochester police officers scrambled in, grabbed the man by the belt, and hoisted him to safety.

As luck would have it, a Post Bulletin photographer was Johnny-on-the-spot and captured the entire harrowing event, including the dramatic rescue, in photos and video.

But you didn't see our footage. Why?

To some degree, it goes back to a conversation I'd had about three weeks ago with Gayle Olsen, a retired Winona State University instructor and founder of a Rochester nonprofit that serves the needs of people who

Gayle asked me: What was the purpose of our report? This was a minor crime, in the grand scheme of things, involving a vulnerable person who's not fully in control of her own actions.

Why indeed? It's a hard question to answer. And let's acknowledge that this is a thin skin to start scratching. It doesn't take long to break through. The question of "why" has the potential to unravel justification for a lot of the coverage we do — stories that you, a reader, might very well find necessary, or simply just enjoy having.

As humans in society, we have an interest in our fellow people, the different ways they live their lives, the things that they achieve, and the fates that sometimes befall them. We expect, in our free society, to be informed. And yes, there will be hard and unpleasant stories in the Post Bulletin from time to time. But when there is a cost to the subject, we have to weigh that against the public's desire to know. Does someone

who has a drug addiction deserve to be spotlighted for his or her fairly minor misdeeds? Should the sight of somebody having their worst day — a mental health breakdown on a highway bridge in Rochester — be put on display to thousands of pairs of eyes?

And, as Gayle reminded me, sometimes it's more than the individual who bears the cost of the stigma and shame. "There's so little awareness of the impact on families," she said. "The hidden, invisible and innocent victims."

In the end, after much thought and discussion, we made the choice. We would not publish or post our images of what happened on that bridge.

We did run a brief article about the incident. We respected your right to know why you were stuck on the highway for so long. We simply stopped short of levying an incalculable cost to the person who was the cause of it all.

Did we make the right call? You might disagree. Gayle, though, thought our story was effective

and appropriate in its manner of informing the public while not causing more harm.

"This is a person who was suffering," she said. "Whoever he is, he has a story that brought him to a pretty desperate point."

And, thanks to the four officers who saved him, the man has a story that

continues. Maybe that footage of ours will have its eventual use as part of a story of recovery, heroism and gratitude. That would be a good use.

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