

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

Ecklund's aid bill

Legislation would provide much-needed help for border and fire-impacted businesses

As if the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic haven't been strain enough for many North Country businesses, the impact of last year's fire-related closures in the Boundary Waters, as well as the effective closure of the U.S.-Canadian border going on nearly two years now, has piled the misery even higher.

Several economic development officials, a tribal chairman, and North Country business owners testified in a state House committee on Feb. 16 in support of legislation that would create the Canadian Border Counties Economic Relief Program. If passed by the Legislature, it could provide a much-needed shot in the arm for area outfitters, hotels, shops, and other businesses that have been impacted by recent closures.

The legislation (HF 2811), authored by Rep. Rob Ecklund of International Falls would provide up to \$15 million in funding to help businesses in the region that can demonstrate significant losses as a result of the closures. Local wilderness outfitters, who saw what had looked to be an excellent summer whither in the face of widespread Boundary Waters closures, would be among the potential beneficiaries with both loans and grants.

While some businesses in the region have done fine, even thrived, during the pandemic, certain businesses, particularly those that rely on cross-border traffic, have been severely impacted. Among the hardest hit is the Grand Portage Band, located at the very tip of the Arrowhead. The band had just completed an expensive renovation of their hotel resort and casino when COVID hit. Given their location, about 45 miles southwest of Thunder Bay, Canadian guests have traditionally made up about 80-85 percent of the band's customer base. When COVID arrived and the borders shut down, their business dropped 90 percent, according to tribal chairman Robert Deschampe. It has yet to recover. While the border is technically open, the restrictions in place are onerous enough, particularly for discretionary crossings, that Canadian visitors are staying away.

It's much the same at

International Falls, where border crossings fell from nearly 400,000 in 2019, to barely 80,000 in 2020. Many retailers in that border city rely on Canadians for most of their sales, so the disappearance of Canadian shoppers has devastated retail stores, gas stations, medical providers, and restaurants. The fall-off in American-based traffic coming through town on the way to the border has also hit businesses hard. That undoubtedly contributed to the closure of the community's long-time newspaper, *The Journal*, among nearly a dozen other businesses.

Imagine the impact, as well, at Ryden's Border Store, a gas station and duty-free shop located about a quarter-mile from the border crossing near Grand Portage. The Ryden family has owned and operated the store since 1947, but they've never experienced the kind of impact the border closure had on their business, which went from a busy and thriving enterprise to nearly a ghost town when the border closed. They, like many of the businesses that would potentially benefit from this bill, have been devastated by events that have clearly been beyond their control.

It's hardly unusual for the state to pitch in with financial assistance under such circumstances. In 2016, for example, when the walleye fishery on Mille Lacs Lake collapsed, the Legislature approved a \$3.6 million aid package, including grants and loans, to help resort owners and other businesses in that area, who were severely affected by the steep decline in anglers. Ecklund's bill is modeled on that earlier relief package.

For those businesses truly affected by these closures, Ecklund's bill would be a godsend. At the same time, the closures last year didn't affect every business in the region. In fact, some did very well and, quite frankly, don't need additional support from taxpayers. Fortunately, the measure would require that businesses document a financial decline from 2019 of at least ten percent. Businesses that have truly been hurt by the closures will have no difficulty documenting that harm. Which is why we urge the Legislature to adopt Ecklund's measure.



"THEY BOTH SAY THEY WANT TO GET BACK TO NORMAL.
THE PROBLEM IS, THIS IS NORMAL."

Letters from Readers

Vote Rick Stoehr for Greenwood board

Greenwood Township residents will go the polls on March 8 to elect one supervisor to the township board. I am writing to you concerning the candidate, Rick Stoehr. I have known Rick for 20 years-plus. He is an honest guy, hardworking, and will do what he can to help, however he can.

He follows through on what he says. Rick attends most of the township meetings. He sees what is happening. He does not just spout off. He does his homework before he speaks.

Greenwood needs a change. I encourage you to vote for Rick Stoehr.

George Stefanich
Greenwood Township

Thanks for the great coverage of Ely's Winter Festival

As a member of the Board of Directors of the Ely Winter Festival, I want to thank the *Timberjay* for Keith Vandervort's comprehensive stories in the run-up to the festival and for his pictures throughout the festival. This is an important public service.

The Ely Winter Festival is a nonprofit organization that couldn't mount this festival each year without support from our sponsors; the snow carvers; sponsors of events; the Ely Chamber of Commerce; in-kind donations from local businesses; grants, including from the Arrowhead Regional Arts Council, the Donald G. Gardner Trust, the Minnesota State Arts Board; and many dedicated volunteers. We give special thanks to the Ely Public Works Department.

We're happy that the festival coincides with the Ely Artwalk. Those volunteers have created a wonderland in the windows of Ely's businesses. It's not too late to walk up and down Sheridan and Chapman Streets and see the beautiful pieces created by local artists and craftspersons.

The displays will be up until the end of the month.

The EWF Board and our coordinator, Shauna Vega, work year-round to bring this beautiful festival to Ely every year.

Carol Orban
Ely

Why I think Camp Atsokan is so important

I recently finished a grant interview, the board chair asked, "Wow, where did you get your passion?" That got me thinking. Metacognition is my pastime. Yes, indeed, yes indeed, where does that passion to support young women come from? Meta, meta, meta. Where does that passion for the sharing of stories come from? Where does that need to be heard come from?

So, during my COVID-induced Writing Sabbatical (thank you, VCC) here is what I came up with. I am the product of the Vietnam War. (Technically, not a war. I know.) The words and pictures of that era, etched in my brain. Little Kim Phuc Phan Thi running naked down the street, arms outstretched like Christ on a cross. Napalmed in Error the headline read, the headline etched in my ten-year-old brain. She could be me. I could be she. I could be her. Being raised on a military base wasn't easy, it was during a war pretending to be a military exercise, and these stateside disappointments were considered "the sissy" brigade (gotta love the patriarchal use of that word), weren't the easiest men to be around, this was before we understood the effects of trauma on the brain. (Note to self: That last sentence was way too Faulkner.) Let's just say, a military base wasn't a safe place to be a kid. But it is the culture I grew up in and it's my tribe, a tribe which I am still very protective of. It was a tribe but it was also a caste system. Rank and file, pecking order. Yes, it still bothers me. The privileged children of pilots lived in brick houses, while the others, the merely enlisted, lived in cul de sacs of cruelty and criticism, tough times, everyone was stressed, but I understand it

now, those subconscious choices we make that appear to the outside world as our "core values".

I like Camp Atsokan because it supports young women. I helped create Camp Atsokan because young people need a place to be heard. And stories can be shared. And stories can be cared for and honored in the right space by adults who know how. I support Camp Atsokan because I believe that young people need a safe space to find a sacred place in their hearts. There is no "Other," there is no "Us" and "Them," there is only WE.

Camp Atsokan is also a place where young women hold a sacred space to listen to other people's stories. I support that. I have heard the criticism of the gender bias in Camp Atsokan design. That is true. I own that. That is just laziness on my part and part of the reason I sat down to write this. I am willing, and Story Portage is more than willing, to support any parent or teacher who wishes to create an equal camp for boys. And I will support you in the exact same manner I currently support Heather Cavalier. Whatever you would like us to co-create with you, we will. Because the most important thing is that we are sharing our stories, in sacred places of beauty and respect.

You can support Camp Atsokan and/or Story Portage by sending a check to Story Portage, PO Box 286, Ely, MN 55731. Yes, the rumor is true, Camp Atsokan is transferring to a bigger organization in 2023. I totally support the move because children are children, no matter where they grew up or where they were born. She could be me and I could be she. This is not about my ego—yes, I know I have a super ego, I own that as well—and in this case, rest assured I fully understand irony—but this writing sabbatical has taught me a great deal, that there is only WE. And WE are "oneness."

Jeanette Marie Cox
Ely

War and Peace: The choice is ours

I've hung out a lot with peace-loving people, so I've been aware for a long time of efforts to create a Department of Peace at the cabinet level. It makes total sense. We NEED one.

However, I haven't helped to get one created nor even dug very deeply to find out what has been happening with the idea, so, here's



BETTY FIRTH

a little digging, and I'll share that info with you, because you probably don't know much about it either. As often happens, my intention to cover the topic in depth is not supported by the space available to me, but I can offer a beginning.

I have heard it said that one difficulty with promoting the concept

of peace is that it doesn't come with hard-hitting images, so it is often defined by what it is not, as in "not at war," rather than by what it really means, such as living in safe neighborhoods, working cooperatively with others, enjoying a country where people have food, shelter, and health care as basic human rights. Although I use the word "peace" here, it must be understood that unless you automatically think "peace and justice," the term is quite meaningless.

I'm going to pause here

just to clarify that I am not completely naïve about this. I recognize that we live in the military-industrial complex that President Eisenhower warned us about in the '50s. His nightmare vision has come true in spades. Our country is addicted to war, and we have seldom been free of conflicts throughout our history, often manipulating the politics and economies of other countries for our benefit. Remember the bumper sticker from the Iraq War: "What's our oil doing under your sand?"

The war machine keeps the factories humming, the miners mining, the research labs producing, and the power and money flowing to the owners of capital without benefitting the rest of us quite so much. That's not to mention the 1,305,000 American deaths and an exponentially larger number of mental and physical injuries from 1775 to 2022.

Those who benefit from the status quo are not likely the ones who will support a Department

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