

OUR VIEW

November elections will be real test of redistricting

It looks like Minnesota lawmakers' inability to work out a redistricting plan on their own turned out quite nicely for most Steele County residents.

Although the district numbers changed, the new boundaries created by a special judicial panel left most residents unscathed. Steele County will now be cut in half, basically in the middle of the county with two Senate districts and three House districts.

Republican Sen. Gene Dornink will have to move, but once he does so – and if he's re-elected – two-thirds of his district will remain the same. And if re-elected, Sen. John Jasinski, R-Faribault, will continue to serve the northern half of Steele County, including Medford and Owatonna.

As for the legislative districts, most Steele County residents will be served by their existing representatives if re-elected. The exceptions are residents living in Ellendale and Blooming Prairie. Both communities will be represented by someone other than their current representative because of changes to the legislative district boundaries.

If this sounds akin to insider baseball talk, it is – only in this case, it's insider politics.

Don't worry. This, too, shall pass.

Every one of Minnesota's 67 Senate districts and 134 House districts was changed, which means a massive reshuffling of the state's legislature after November's election.

Each of the eight U.S. Congressional districts saw its boundaries change, too.

The goal of this entire exercise is to ensure that every citizen is represented equally.

When new election maps are created, each district supposedly gets its equal share of the state's total population. So whether you live in a big city or a rural area, you yield no more or no less power than another person in the state.

We'll have to wait until the November elections to finally see who ends up on first and who ends up on second, but for now, the outcome is back in the hands of the voters – not lawmakers.

GUEST COLUMN

Working to retain educators

BY CHRIS PICHA

Educators play a vital role in shaping the lives of the people in their communities. The demand for services provided by these professionals is increasing due to society's expectations of ensuring our students are college or career and life ready. Practices such as an effective recruiting strategy, positive culture, mentoring and induction programs for newly hired staff, guided career pathways, and adoption of Grow Your Own and internship programs can help meet the demand to fill a variety of positions.

A school district's retention of an educator begins day one of contact. What today's educators want in the recruitment process that directly links to retention is timely communication and an information-rich process to determine the right placement for them. We share our district high points and challenges early in the recruiting process. We provide interviews with our administrators, educators, parents, and students; give tours of our buildings; and share an overview of the Owatonna community. When educators accept a job at Owatonna Public

Schools, they understand the district's mission and vision and their role in inspiring excellence, every learner, every day.

Our district has taken action to help us not only recruit and retain strong, effective educators during this national staffing crisis, but also support and strengthen our workforce long term. First, positive school culture is a motivation for both existing and aspiring teachers. The work the district has done focuses on building relationships, equity and a positive culture, and it is second to none. We want our educators to feel valued and supported and experience joy in their work. We also provide multiple pathways to educator leadership positions. Educators are motivated to work in the best environments, and the promotion of positive school culture is a practice that attracts and retains more teachers.

Second, novice educators desire high-quality induction and mentoring to assist them in becoming a confident and effective educator who makes a difference in students' lives. Our three-year mentorship program is one of only a handful in See **WORKING** on A4 ▶



Hot Pursuit
RICK BUSSLER

As I watched Sen. John Jasinski through his physical therapy regimen last week at a rehab facility in Plymouth, it became clear to me how eager the veteran lawmaker is to get himself back in shape physically.

"Put on some more weight," Jasinski told the physical therapist during one of his exercises.

Jasinski is making great strides as he improves from a freak snowmobile accident a few weeks ago in northern Minnesota. After initially tipping off the snowmobile, Jasinski stood up and was ready to roll again when he was hit from behind.

"It hit me in the back of the waist," Jasinski said. "Otherwise I

Senator keeps sense of humor through adversity

would have been right up laughing about missing a turn."

Even while laying in the snow, Jasinski kept his sense of humor. He joked about redistricting and asked one his fellow senators if he was going to knock on doors for him in Northfield, which is known for being a liberal community. Jasinski, who is Republican, is used to his conservative district spanning Steele and Rice counties.

As it ended up once redistricting boundaries came out last week, Jasinski doesn't have to worry about campaigning in Northfield this year after all. Northfield will be in District 58 and paired with a big chunk of Dakota County.

Asked how he's feeling, Jasinski said with a laugh, "Healing."

Jasinski broke his left pelvis, three ribs and L5 vertebrae. He'll be doing a lot of shuf-

fling and sliding around for the next two months as he has been told to not put any weight on his legs.

In between therapy sessions, Jasinski said he thinks about what has happened over the past few weeks. "It makes you think about how bad it could have been," he said, adding he is expecting to make a full recovery.

Rehab isn't the only heavy lifting going on in Jasinski's life.

In the past couple years, Jasinski has become a force to be reckoned with when it comes to Minnesota politics. He currently serves as assistant majority leader in the Senate.

When he was working out Friday morning in the rehab facility shortly after the news broke about the death of Congressman Jim Hagedorn, Jasinski's cell phone rang. It was another fellow senator

inquiring if Jasinski was going to run for Congress. Jasinski shrugged off the notion.

I inquired again later after he was done with rehab. Jasinski told me he had no interest in running for federal office and was quite content with Minnesota's political landscape.

I pressed him a little further about a possible run for governor some day. Jasinski didn't rule that out and indicated he would be more interested in doing that than running for office on the national level. But it definitely will not be this time around.

Jasinski has carved out a niche with getting things done around the Capitol. He is proud to be the chief author of a bill helping police officers suffering from PTSD. He said it has a good chance of passing in a larger bill. He is also working to get funding to attract See **SENATOR** on A15 ▶



GUEST COLUMN

Creating equitable economies

BY TIM PENNY

On the heels of celebrating National Entrepreneurship Week, I am taking some time to reflect on what it means to be welcoming to entrepreneurs in our local economies.

Entrepreneurship comes in many forms – from tech companies to home-based businesses. The spark of entrepreneurship also comes from many different people. However, not everyone has equal access to resources – whether due to an historic inequity, a language barrier, a disability or other reasons.

That is why, at Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation (SMIF) we are proud to support minority entrepreneurs through our Prosperity Initiative program.

Prosperity Initiative clients commit to a six-month period of working directly with

an experienced business coach for a total of 40 hours. Additionally, clients connect monthly with other entrepreneurs participating in the program through peer network meetings to discuss challenges and successes. All of the resources that are shared are free for participating businesses.

When the Prosperity Initiative was created in 2016, its mission was to help remove barriers to success for entrepreneurs who identify as Black, Indigenous or People of Color, including new immigrants to our region. While this still holds true, at its core this program is about removing barriers to success for all minority entrepreneurs. That is why this year we have expanded the eligibility to also include entrepreneurs who identify as women, veterans, low-income and/or a person with

disabilities. This follows the definition of a minority entrepreneur as set by Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development's (DEED) Emerging Entrepreneur Loan Program of which we are a partner. DEED also generously funds the Prosperity Initiative.

More than 80 entrepreneurs have graduated from this program since it began six years ago. The businesses that have grown from participating in this program include clothing stores, restaurants, grocery stores, a cleaning service, a landscaping service, a home fragrance spray and even a Spanish immersion preschool. One by one, these entrepreneurs are making a difference in their local economies.

Angel Uribe's Eagle Lake-based business, Stages of Change

Center, empowers individuals to rethink their relationship with drugs or alcohol. She began the business in 2011 with no financing or support. In 2016, she joined the Prosperity Initiative which helped her develop business competencies and strategies that are still helping her navigate her business with greater confidence today. Angel also serves on SMIF's Board of Trustees.

Husband and wife team, Jose Rodriguez and Cecilia Cifuentes, own West Oakland Auto in Austin. They first connected with SMIF in 2012 for a loan which helped grow their business. In 2016, they received a second SMIF loan, this time to help them expand into their own space, a building which they now own. During these changes, Cifuentes participated in the Prosperity See **CREATING** on A4 ▶

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