

## OUR VIEW

# Group's lobbying good for Duluth

What's good for the Coalition of Greater Minnesota Cities is good for Duluth. Look no further than the first three words at the top of the coalition's legislative priorities flier for this year. They're the same three words that lead Duluth's 2022 list of legislative priorities: Local Government Aid, or LGA.

"We're making the case that LGA still lags behind inflation," coalition Executive Director Bradley Peterson said in a telephone interview last week with the News Tribune Opinion page. "Since 2009, inflation has increased by 27%, while the LGA funding amount has only increased by about 16%. So it has not kept up with inflation. Nor have we kept up with LGA as a share of the state's general fund. Back, again, in 2009, LGA made up about 3.12% of the state's general fund, and we're now down to just a little over 2%. So, however you slice it, LGA has just not been keeping up."

Peterson spoke with the News Tribune a day ahead of his St. Paul-based coalition's annual lobbying blitz to the state Capitol. More than 100 Minnesota mayors, city council members, and city staff members from outside the Twin Cities were expected to participate. Gov. Tim Walz was to address them. And a coalition-led legislative-leaders panel was to feature House Speaker Melissa Hortman, DFL-Brooklyn Park; House Minority Leader Kurt Daudt, R-Crown; Senate Minority Leader Melisa Lopez Franzen, DFL-Edina; and Deputy Senate Majority Leader Mark Johnson, R-East Grand Forks.

The coalition is among those lobbying the Legislature this year for a \$90 million increase in Local Government Aid, from about \$564 million to approximately \$654 million — a whole lot closer, but still "not quite there," to catching up with inflation, Peterson said. Sen. Tom Bakk, I-Cook, and Rep. Dave Lislegard, DFL-Aurora, have introduced bills including the \$90 million increase.

"It'd be a pretty significant increase (and) ... good for Duluth," Peterson said.

Very good. For half a century, the state's Local Government Aid program has been a godsend to regional

hubs like Duluth and to poorer, often rural, areas, ensuring that no matter where Minnesotans live, they can expect a similar high quality of life and public services. The program returns tax dollars to local communities that need it. In Duluth, LGA helps offset the costs of maintaining streets, parks, libraries, and more with the reality that 35,000 commuters per day and 6.7 million tourists per year pour in, use and enjoy our public community features, but don't pay a penny in property taxes for them.

After more than a decade of LGA being repeatedly targeted for cuts because of budget shortfalls or just out of pure political spite, the Legislature restored the program to its 2002 funding level in 2019. Last year, lawmakers voted to maintain funding, but for only one year. With a state budget surplus pushing a record-high nearly \$9.3 billion, lawmakers will be hard-pressed to say no to responsibly increasing LGA this session, making up at least some for the underfunding of years past.

The coalition also lobbied lawmakers last week for state dollars to locate and then begin removing lead water pipes that date back decades. About 5,000 of Duluth's 28,000 water customers are in older homes with lead service lines, and if lead leaches into drinking water, of course, it can pose a serious health risk. That hasn't happened in Duluth yet, thankfully, and the city, to its credit, is regularly monitoring and testing. Still, getting the old pipes replaced is a public-health priority.

"Duluth is actually further along than many communities in Greater Minnesota in terms of understanding what's in the ground," Peterson said. "But Duluth needs this, too."

Also on the coalition's lobbying list was state help to incentivize the creation of housing, especially affordable housing, and to increase child care availability and lower child care costs — both of which also are on Duluth's set-in-January list of legislative priorities.

How effective was the coalition's lobbying efforts last week? Duluth can hope its blitz was as impactful and productive as possible.

## CARTOONIST'S VIEW



Dave Whamond/Cagle Cartoons

## LOCAL VIEW

# Putin's invasion a threat to world's democracies

On Sept. 1, 1939, Hitler invaded Poland. It's far too easy to forget how slowly and reluctantly the world's most powerful democracies mobilized to stop him.

France and Britain declared war two days after the invasion but didn't engage in a full-scale war with the Nazis for another eight months. Hitler went on to

invade Belgium, Netherlands, Luxembourg, and France. The United States didn't enter the war until December 1941. It took World War II, millions of lives lost, and physical destruction and devastation to finally put an end to Hitler's madness.

Vladimir Putin invaded Georgia in 2008. He took over South Ossetia and Abkhazia, where he maintains a troop presence today. Other than a mild slap on the wrist, not much was done by the West to discourage such illegal action. He did it again twice in 2014 when he invaded Ukraine and annexed Crimea, and he has a major military presence there as well. He also supported the separatists in the Donbas Region with military support and weaponry, which has now been an eight-year war with approximately 14,000 people killed. Again, other than a mild slap on the wrist, the West has failed to do much to discourage such illegal activity.

In fact, I believe the West's inactions have emboldened the Russian president.

Now we are witnessing a massive invasion into Ukraine, which is killing innocent civilians

and bringing massive destruction to infrastructure, government buildings, housing, and other facilities, all of which will cripple Ukraine's economy for years to come. Putin has displaced thousands of Ukrainian citizens, who have fled to other countries, mostly their neighbor Poland, for help. Fortunately, the free world has come to their aid with humanitarian help.

All of this death and destruction just so Putin can rewrite history based on some false pretense that Ukraine belongs to Russia.

Putin is a mad man just like Hitler was.

Putin is a danger not just to Ukraine; he is a danger to all democracies. While he has launched a military attack against Ukraine, he has launched numerous cyberattacks against other democracies, including putting out disinformation to disrupt free elections. He has used cyberattacks to disrupt governments as well as businesses all across the globe. He will continue to use his cyberwarfare to do significant damage to democratic countries.

President Joe Biden has made some mistakes in addressing the Ukraine invasion. He should have sent more military hardware and ammunition to Ukraine to help it defend itself when Putin was moving troops to its borders. He has done a good job of getting European countries and NATO to stand tall together to economically hit Putin very hard. Sanctions will create disruptions not just for Russia but also, even if to a lesser degree, to other nations, including the U.S. The question will be: Is the free world willing to make the personal sacrifices necessary to ultimately

maintain the freedoms we enjoy in a democracy?

Now is not the time to weaken. It's not the time, especially for U.S. politicians, to cast blame on Presidents Donald Trump or Biden — or on Republicans or Democrats. Now is not the time to play Monday morning quarterback.

We have witnessed opinion TV supporting Putin in what he is doing and questioning why the U.S. is supporting Ukraine. We have seen some politicians saying similar things. We can't politicize this like we did COVID-19 and have us turn against each other. This is about the future of democracy itself. This is about preserving the freedoms we have in a democracy and not losing our rights and privileges.

Countries like Russia take those freedoms away from their citizens. Look at the thousands of protesters, protesting the Russian invasion into Ukraine, a sovereign nation, who have been arrested in Russia and face prison time — for peaceful demonstrations!

Putin doesn't seem to give a damn about freedom and appears ready to do anything he feels he can get away with to chip away at democratic countries. He will continue his efforts to divide the people of democratic countries so your neighbors, your friends, and your family members become your enemy — not Putin or Russia.

Stay strong, America. We are being tested like never before.

My heart goes out to the Ukrainian government, its leaders, and the citizens of Ukraine.

J. Doug Pruitt of Knife River is a writer and contributor to the News Tribune Opinion page.

## READERS' VIEWS

### Readers' Views and Local Views

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**Email submissions to:** letters@duluthnews.com.

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### Election integrity, legal integrity linked

Founders lamenting citizens too comfortable in their freedoms foresaw the prudence of creating "auxiliary" protections commensurate with threats endangering America's republic. Perfidious lawyers unscrupulously probing constitutional weaknesses to subvert our constitutional republic would certainly qualify. Like radical leftists whose only peace their altru-

ism cares about is their piece of the action. It's an oxymoron to claim to be American and use cultural Marxist propaganda to justify divvying up power and victimhood based on race, demanding everyone just go along or become crushed by government powers. Any wonder interest in fortifying America's constitutional republic against enemies from within has grown to include modernizing the Communist Control Act of 1954.

Unlike the "living document doctrine" for constitutional interpretations, there's no expiration date to literal text and original intent interpretations of the Constitution. So when court decisions dash leftist activists' hopes of exploiting perfidious conceptions of constitutional law, they throw partisan fits, threaten the courts, and riot.

A February story in the Epoch Times described the "Independent State Legislatures Doctrine" prudent-

ly revived by the court in response to perfidious legal prodding's dating back to the 2000 election. And right on cue, Democratic tantrums commenced, like the Feb. 20 letter in the News Tribune, "Here's another way to steal an election," which perfidiously framed the court's decision as some kind of Republican cheating tactic, dishonestly omitting the 1892 McPherson v. Blacker decision giving the court impetus in reaffirming state leg-

islatures' broad powers over selecting electors.

Despite Democratic claims of innocence, illegally changing 2020 election laws was, you know, illegal. An analogy would be weakening America's defenses just before an attack, which is treasonous. Election cheating was as illegal then as today. Election integrity and legal integrity are inextricably linked.

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