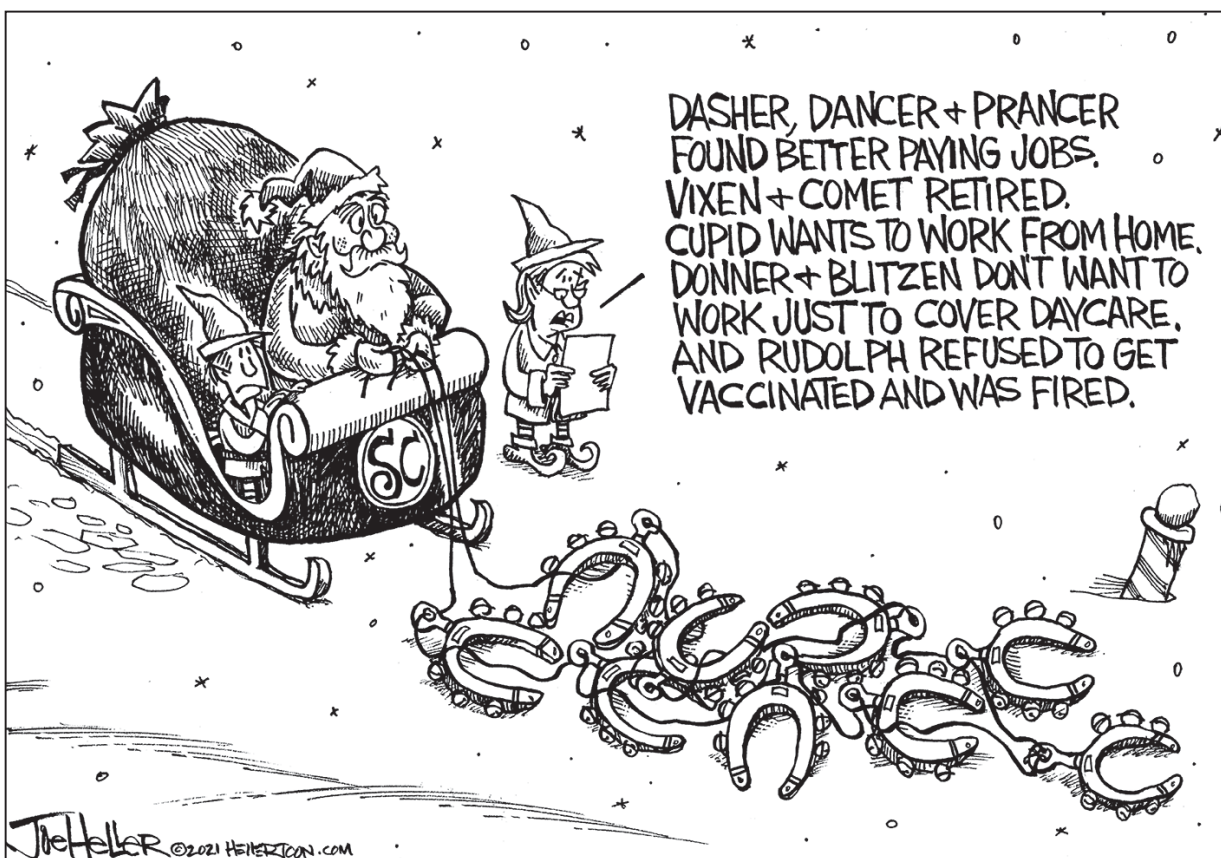


# Opinion



## Times Like These Call For Safety Measures

As the Foo Fighters' song says, "It's times like these you learn to live again."

In this time, during the pandemic, the band put those words into action and pulled out of playing at the University of Minnesota stadium in 2022 because management there wouldn't require the audience to be vaccinated.

Living safely is what these times call for.

The band isn't alone. Elvis Costello canceled his concert at Mystic Lake and played instead at First Avenue last month because the downtown Minneapolis nightclub required proof of vaccination or a recent negative COVID-19 test.

Closer to home at Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, the popular Christmas in Christ Chapel event during the weekend required that adult audience members be vaccinated or provide proof of a recent negative test. The same goes for "Weird Al" Yankovic's upcoming July concert at the Mankato civic center's Grand Hall.

More Minnesota acts, venues, bars and restaurants are requiring such proof so that they can

continue to operate as safely as possible and keep producing revenue.

Taking such measures not only makes patronizing such places less of a health risk, but it's an economic move that ensures continued operation.

Being the host of a super spreader event is not the best publicity for an establishment that wants to bring back business. And some customers just prefer not to visit places for a long duration where unvaccinated people are allowed to mix with the vaccinated, especially without a mask requirement.

As the new omicron variant nips at our heels, safety in public places should become even a higher priority. The variant, already in Minnesota, is believed to be even more transmissible than delta. So far vaccinated people who've been infected with omicron have suffered milder symptoms. Yet another reason to get shots and boosters.

Living our lives in these times means making reasonable adjustments to keep ourselves and everyone around us safe.

Mankato Free Press

## To Stay Competitive, U.S. Should Focus On Fundamentals



**Lee Hamilton**  
Center on Representative Government

What do we need to do to strengthen our competitive position in the global economy? We need to focus on the basics. Our competitiveness depends on the fundamentals.

First, we need to support the talent and skills of our people, their productivity and their ability to innovate. Second, we need to strengthen our infrastructure: not only roads, bridges and transit but the "soft infrastructure" of education, the tax system and health care. Finally, we need to bolster the stability and credibility of our institutions. America's deep political divisions and growing economic inequality weaken

our ability to compete.

We are deeply attached to the idea of the United States as a global leader and the world's "indispensable nation." But while our economy is the world's largest, that doesn't make it the most competitive. China presents formidable challenges, while nations in Europe and Asia are among the most innovative.

An annual competitiveness index from the World Economic Forum placed the U.S. at No. 1 in 2018, but it fell to second the following year, surpassed by Singapore. (There was no rating in

Competitive See Page 5

## Leadership

"A true leader has the confidence to stand alone, the courage to make tough decisions, and the compassion to listen to the needs of others. He does not set out to be a leader, but becomes one by the equality of his actions and the integrity of his intent."

Gen. Douglas MacArthur

## Leadership Foundation Of A Healthy Community



### A Drop of Ink

By Reed Anfinson  
Publisher

- Environmental stewardship  
- Life-long learning  
Leadership is the foundation on which the other eight dimensions are built. Leadership identifies the needs and then brings together the people and resources to see them met.

"Blandin Foundation helps rural Minnesota leaders develop and enhance the skills, knowledge, and relationships they need to build and sustain healthy communities," it says of its mission. "Blandin Foundation is all about Minnesotans imagining, leading, and growing healthy, inclusive - vibrant - communities."

Blandin sees community leadership as a network where many people fill leadership roles. They are supported by a larger network of volunteers who reflect the community's diversity based on age, gender, and ethnicity. The community nurtures the leadership skills of its leaders and volunteers, so they become more effective in building a better community.

Good leaders collaborate, share credit, and encourage others to take on responsibility. They create gates to allow inclusion; they don't build fences.

Leaders are visionary. They address today's challenges while looking at what our communities will be facing in the coming years and putting in place the mechanisms that allow us to adapt. Leaders are willing to be innovative and take risks in the process. They share optimism, not pessimism. They do what is right and necessary without looking over their shoulders to see if everyone agrees with them.

Blandin's program teaches leaders to assess the assets of their community upon which success is built. They create networks that bring people together to achieve common goals. They create an environment where "innovation is valued,

and risk shared," creating "a breeding ground for entrepreneurial ideas and action." They create and maintain the mechanisms in a community that fosters and sustains success, Blandin says.

Leadership isn't easy these days. "To lead is to live dangerously because when leadership counts, when you have to lead people through difficult change, you challenge what people hold dear - their daily habits, tools, loyalties, and ways of thinking - with nothing more to offer perhaps than a possibility," Ronald A. Heifetz and Marty Linsky write in their book "Leadership on the Line." The book is used in the Blandin leadership programs.

Though their book was written before the COVID-19 pandemic, its basic truths of leadership's challenges are especially true today.

A quote appropriate for this time in American society comes from French philosopher Voltaire who lived in the 1700s: "Those who can make you believe absurdities can make you commit atrocities." Our information sources today are filled with absurdities put out by those seeking power and profit.

In rural America, the small atrocities pile up. The normalization of coarseness and incivility laces our discussions today, with threats of violence lurking behind the words.

Members of our local school boards supporting a levy to raise funds have their lives threatened. Mayors, following state and federal rules for keeping the public safe during a pandemic, have their yards and vehicles vandalized. County board members face vigilante groups demanding they act on subjects they have little control over, such as immigration, gun rights, and COVID-19 mandates.

Many who serve in public leadership

positions today are stepping down because of the real dangers they and their families face. Many others are choosing not to take on leadership roles. We are losing some of our best and brightest to the meanest and most narrow-minded of citizens in our community.

How do we convince citizens to step into positions of authority and responsibility in such troubled times?

"Leadership is worth the risk because the goals..." make the lives of the people in your community better and gives meaning to life, Heifetz and Linsky write.

At times, our local leaders find that the role they've taken requires far more work, time, and sacrifice than they could have imagined. Rather than shrink from the challenge, they rise to it - but the demands take a toll. If you have good leaders in your community, go out of your way to thank them. They are a precious resource that needs nurturing.

Too many leaders are placeholders. They manage decline rather than stimulate growth. This is a time that demands leaders be actively engaged with open minds and innovative thinking. It is a time for stretching boundaries and taking risks.

In our four decades of covering public bodies, we've seen all styles of leadership. We've seen periods of incredible innovative thinking that have propelled a community forward and stretches of meager support that holds it back.

"Nowadays, people know the price of everything and the value of nothing," author Oscar Wilde wrote. When this thinking is applied to leading a community to rise up to meet challenges and strengthen itself in each of Blandin's nine dimensions, it drags it down rather than building it up.

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