

OPINION

OUR VIEW

The gift of giving

As we approach Christmas, this community again displays a generosity matched by no other. The easy examples are the volunteers involved in the many details of the upcoming Community Christmas Dinner, as well as Operation Shoebox, The Angel Tree and countless other ways we know of, and probably many we don't. This year, it seems more young people are thinking of others who have a greater need than themselves. While no one can blame a youngster for dreaming of the gifts they hope to unwrap on Christmas, we've seen and shared example after example of this community's youth sharing the spirit of giving. Today's edition includes recognition of the efforts of Falls Elementary third graders who decided to forgo a gift exchange among themselves in favor of collecting money to purchase food bags from Stewart's Super One to give to the Falls Hunger Coalition. Clearly, our young people understand it's easy to find reasons to be grateful for what they have and to attempt to help others who have less.

It's not too late for us all to get in the spirit of giving. Bell ringers are needed to bolster The Salvation Army's Red Kettle Campaign and a donation made today will have double the benefits. Contact The Salvation Army at 283-3394 to make a donation or to volunteer before 2 p.m. on Christmas Eve when the kettles will be removed from Stewart's Super One, Kmart and County Market. Food and volunteers are still needed for the Community Christmas Dinner held from 2-6 p.m. Wednesday at the Roadhouse. The Journal continues to play host to a Christmas tree where donations for the Borderland Humane Society may be dropped off. The Falls Hunger Coalition sees more need during the holidays and would welcome a donation now or at anytime. There may be no better way to celebrate Christmas than to help others who have less. The gift of giving truly benefits the giver, as well as the receiver. To share that experience with our children may mean another generation of generosity in this community.



GUEST COLUMN

Good forecast, but more to be done

The principal credit for Minnesota's terrific budget forecast belongs to the people of Minnesota. We proved again that we have the best business innovators and the most productive workers anywhere. By working hard and working together, we turned a \$6 billion deficit predicted just 3 years ago, into a projected surplus of \$1.086 billion over the next 18 months.

The financial experts, who prepared this forecast, made it clear that these surpluses are being generated by our state's exceptionally strong economic growth. Minnesota's economic recovery leads most states and the nation. 122,000 more people are working in Minnesota today than when I became governor in January 2011. The growth in our total state economy last year was the fifth best in the nation.

It is important to note, however, that this recovery has not helped everyone. 142,000 Minnesotans are still looking for work, and many others cannot find the jobs they want. There are still unacceptable gaps in education, job opportunities, and income among our citizens.

We have more work to do, but we are getting better.

It is sometimes hard to believe good economic news about Minnesota. Mostly we hear from the critics, who claim our policies are driving businesses and jobs elsewhere. Some of them even tried to make this recent good news look bad. They seem unhappy that our state's economy is improving – because it doesn't fit with their policy views or political ambitions.

Nevertheless, there is more good news. We have repaid all of the \$2.8 billion previously



Mark DAYTON GOVERNOR

borrowed from school districts. After a decade of education funding cuts, we are reinvesting in our schools and our schoolchildren – with early childhood scholarships, all-day kindergarten, and two-year tuition freezes at state colleges and universities.

Those investments are already showing results. 73 percent of Minnesota's youngest children are now rated "ready for kindergarten," compared with 60 percent in 2009. Our fourth grade students tested No. 1 in the nation for math and placed 10th in reading, up from 22nd two years earlier. And, for the 8th straight year, our high school seniors placed first in the ACT, a nationwide college entrance exam.

The Minnesota Legislature has also enabled us to increase our investments with private companies throughout Minnesota in development projects that will create thousands of new jobs. Those public-private partnerships include growing manufacturing facilities in Owatonna, Sauk Rapids, and Duluth, an expanded Research & Development facility at 3M's corporate headquarters in Oakdale, and a major expansion by Rochester's Mayo Clinic into a Destination

Medical Center. The new stadium in Minneapolis has already attracted a \$400 million office project next to it, which is that city's largest private development in a generation.

This economic recovery confirms the wisdom of "The Minnesota Model" for economic success and social vitality. We are not a low-tax haven, like Mississippi, Alabama, China, or Cambodia. We know that those low taxes are usually accompanied by low wages, under-funded public education, weak environmental protection, and high crime rates.

Instead, we choose to be a high value state. We provide very good public school educations, which together with our citizens' exceptional abilities, produce a most reliable, hard-working, and productive workforce. We have built an extensive transportation network, which, while currently lacking adequate funding, has historically met the needs of Minnesota businesses and citizens. We provide incentives for companies to expand here and create new jobs. And we offer the very best health care, recreation, quality of people, and quality of life anywhere.

Should we be satisfied with this progress? Certainly not. To the contrary, we must work even harder to create more good jobs for middle-income Minnesotans, reduce income gaps for others, and assure even better futures for our children and grandchildren. However, our progress proves that what we are doing to get Minnesota working again is working.

So, let's keep making progress.

How to contact your lawmakers

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WHAT OTHERS SAY

A celebration of not giving up

There was an incredibly warm feeling of community on the East Range Friday on the coldest day so far of this season.

After nearly nine years of planning, review, starts and stops and more starts and stops, the projected NorthMet PolyMet copper/nickel/precious metals reached a huge milestone with the release of a supplemental Environmental Impact Statement for public comment.

And that paves the way for final review and ultimately permitting. And then construction and finally production.

There are still hurdles to clear. And there still will, of course, be plenty of continuing opposition to the project that will create 360 permanent jobs; hundreds more of spin-off positions; more than 2 million hours of construction work; millions and millions of local, county, state and national taxes; and a lot of paychecks for hard-working

people on the Range.

But Friday was still a day for celebration _ a celebration of communities on the East Range for regaining their feet after suffering a terrible blow of the closing of the LTV Mining Co. plant in Hoyt Lakes in 2001 and the loss of 1,400 jobs.

Resiliency, gumption and a can-do and never-give-up attitude were evident in the smiles and laughter of people in the room of the PolyMet administrative building where a gathering in the wake of the release of the EIS was held. And those virtues flowed from speech after speech that carried the same message _ we are alive and well on the East Range and we are moving forward, not dwelling on the past.

Environmental extremists will nit-pick the 2,200-page EIS. And they will threaten litigation and most likely at some point sue the state and federal agencies

that are co-leaders of the review.

But, as PolyMet President and CEO Jon Cherry said, they will have a high threshold.

PolyMet and all supporters of this project have the same goal: To do this project the right way so that these minerals that are so vital to the daily lives of everyone in the world can be mined and produced here on the Range to the benefit of all, rather than in another country where the environment is of little, if any, concern.

Friday was a very good on the Iron Range.

The day construction begins on the project at the end of 2014 or the beginning of 2015 will be a very, very good day.

And when production begins, likely in the first quarter of 2016, it will truly be a great day.

And through it all let's celebrate the Iron Range spirit of never, ever giving up.

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