

OPINION

OUR VIEW

Move for the future

Minnesota has a \$1.23 billion state budget surplus, which should be handled carefully. The surplus is a good indicator the state's economy is turning around. But we urge lawmakers not to view this as a goodie bag. Instead, we'd like to see the extra money used to boost the stability and health of the recovery. A good start to that way of thinking is by approving House File 1777 to provide tax relief for the middle class and Minnesota businesses. This bill repeals all three business-to-business sales taxes approved by the Legislature last session. The House has approved the bill, and the governor has included the repeal in his budget plan. The three taxes include the business to business warehouse tax, the telecommunication equipment tax and the commercial equipment repair tax. These three taxes were ill advised, especially during challenging economic times, and dull Minnesota's competitive edge with neighboring states. And we urge the Senate to

act now to ensure that the sales tax on storage and warehouse services does not go into effect April 1. The bill would also align state tax law with federal law to provide \$301 million in tax credits and deductions. Under the plan to correct these inequities, married couples, working families, people paying for child care and those paying off student loans would benefit. The tax conformity part of the bill also simplifies the filing process and reduces taxes for nearly 1 million Minnesotans. As of Tuesday, the Senate was still working on a bill to match up with the House's approved \$500 million in cuts. While unlikely to meet Gov. Mark Dayton's goal of enacting a relief package this week, we could still head off the kick-in of the three B2B taxes if the Senate moves quickly. The actions by our elected officials, combined with a report last week showing overall statewide property taxes decreasing for the first time in more than a decade, could help paint a brighter picture for Minnesota's future.



"WE INTERRUPT OUR COVERAGE OF PRESIDENT OBAMA'S KINDERGARTEN DANCE VIDEO TO BRING YOU HIS NCAA BRACKETS."

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Grateful for local experience

To the editor,
The experience of directing Jeannine Coulombe's "The Mill" in the city that inspired it was a welcome reminder of what theater at its best can truly accomplish. In February, four carloads of Twin Cities theater artists, at least a dozen hard-working local technicians, builders, and Backus Community Center employees (many of whom volunteered their time) joined over 700 citizens of International Falls to tell the story of the riot of 1989. Although we had already performed the play in Minneapolis, it was such a privilege to listen to the words with new ears, to experience these fictionalized characters and their story with a roomful of people who lived through the real thing, and the families who continue to live the consequences every day. Often, our main challenge as artists is to convince the audience that a story from another time and place pertains to their lives, but from the moment we arrived in International Falls, everyone we met had a story

to share about the events of 1989: waiters, backstage crew, baristas, clerks, even passersby. How refreshing it was to be taught a play's relevance by the audience, itself. Not that we didn't know it, intellectually; we did our homework the first time around, and it's our job to connect those dots. But touring the mill, meeting "Beakers" and union bosses, those who put out the fires and those who set them—that was more than just research. In addition to giving us interesting texture and background information, these conversations showed us how the past continues to haunt and shape your lives, 25 years later. Hearing you talk, in person, about how the play moved you, or "pissed you off..." as one man put it, or just represented your lives on stage... these were real conversations, simple and human, and we are all richer for having had them. Our tour of the paper mill was invaluable, too. To touch, hear, and yes, smell everything that would've permeated these characters lives not only helped us better understand the play,

but our world, both as citizens and people. We will never look at a piece of paper without a new appreciation for how the "cogs" of mass production work—both literally and metaphorically—to hold towns, states, and our entire country together. The sacrifices made on every level to keep these wheels turning are made very stark when one can stand in the ear splitting noise, the cruel temperatures, the ever-present physical danger—whether sudden, due to even the smallest mistake, or gradually, in unseen effects that reveal themselves as the years pass. Through the foresight and generosity of Ward Merrill and the Backus Community Center, and with the support of the citizens of International Falls, Jeannine's beautiful play has become a tool to continue long dormant conversations and begin new ones, repeating and growing into history. The whole Backus team does a terrific job of preserving this town's story. I'm grateful and humbled to have been given this opportunity to help. **Matt Sciple**
Minneapolis

How to contact your lawmakers

FEDERAL OFFICES

President Barack Obama
Democrat
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. N.W.
Washington, D.C., 20500
202-456-1111
Website: www.whitehouse.gov
E-mail: president@whitehouse.gov

U.S. Rep. Rick Nolan
2447 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington DC 20515
202-225-6211
Website: www.nolan.house.gov
Facebook: US Rep Rick Nolan
Twitter: @USRepRickNolan

Duluth Office of Congressman Rick Nolan
11 East Superior Street
Suite 125
Duluth, MN 55802
Phone: 218-464-5095
Fax: 218-464-5098

Brainerd Office of Congressman Rick Nolan
Brainerd City Hall
501 Laurel Street
Brainerd, MN 56401
218-454-4078

U.S. Sen. Amy Klobuchar
Democrat
302 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510
202-224-3244

Minnesota Office:
1200 Washington Avenue

South, Suite 250
Minneapolis, MN 55415
612-727-5220
Website: www.klobuchar.senate.gov

U.S. Sen. Al Franken
Democrat
Senate Hart Building 320
Washington DC 20510
202-224-5641
Website: www.alfranken.com
E-Mail: info@franken.senate.gov

STATE OFFICES

Gov. Mark Dayton
130 State Capitol
75 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
St. Paul, MN, 55155
800-657-3717
E-mail: Mark.Dayton@state.mn.us

Rep. David Dill
571 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155
651-296-2190
800-339-0466
rep.david.dill@house.mn
Assistant: Joan Harrison

Sen. Tom Bakk
75 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
Capitol, Room 226
St. Paul, MN 55155-1606
Capitol Office phone: (651) 296-8881
Email: www.senate.mn/senatorbakkemail

Share your point of view

Make a difference by writing a letter to the editor or contributing to our online discussions. The Journal's Opinion page is where meaningful community discussions take place.

The Journal welcomes letters from readers

Letters should be limited to 500 words or less. Longer letters may be edited. Letters must be signed and include the telephone number and address of the letter writer. Only the author's city address will be published. Mail letters to The Journal, 1602 Highway 71, International Falls 56649. Letters can also be sent by e-mail to laurel@ifalls-journal.com.

Obama is 50 shades of cool

It was more amusing than piano- playing kittens to see Barack Obama plug the Affordable Care Act on Zach Galifianakis' internet comedy show. Not late night. Not basic cable. An internet show: "Between 2 Ferns." Even funnier was the President trotting out the same expression he normally reserves for Bill O'Reilly interviews. The Chief Executive is apparently working his way down the marketing food chain. Next it'll be ObamaCare coupons under windshield wipers in the parking lots of flea markets. Then a series of laminated ads posted above urinals. Won't be long before Joe Biden is wearing a giant syringe costume twirling a sign on Pennsylvania Ave. The president is not new to the humor game. He's proven his comedy chops o'plenty at previous functions, but even professional comedians have problems holding their own with the bearded Hangover franchise comic's trademark condescending snark. 44, however, traded disdainful barbs like a Catskills trained tummler. Looks like the ordeal of dealing with Hillary's State Department staff finally paid off. Can't wait for him speak to Putin with the same sort of Borscht Belt pushback. This was Comedy Obama at his finest. Just one of the many guises we've seen Honolulu's favorite son adopt. There's Diplomatic Obama. Arrogant Obama. Tolerant Obama. Supercilious Obama.



Will DURST
RAGING MODERATE

Hollywood Obama. Mississippi Obama. New Boss Obama. And Same as the Old Boss Obama. Might explain why the country is this close to contracting a serious case of Multiple Presidential Personality Disorder. He's President Sybil. Playing more roles than the tall kid who shaves at a summer Shakespeare camp. Doctors say the onset of Dissociative Identity Disorder can be traced to trauma and its entirely possible the Republican Party is responsible for these many faces of Eve, er, Barack. For 5 years the President has been hit in the head more often than an armless soccer goalie in a World Cup shootout. Of course, he could be setting himself up for an insanity defense. Mitch McConnell would be well advised to hire extra security. The Oval Office Shapeshifter's pre-POTUS resume was pretty tame. Kenyan. Kansan. Hawaiian. Community organizer. Constitutional law professor.

State Senator. U.S. Senator. Marijuana advocate. Audacity encourager. It's only since 2009 that we've been treated to a kaleidoscope of eccentric facets. He's a jock. A nerd. Cheerleader. Teacher's pet. Motorcycle riding bad boy. Probably a closet band geek. Party standard bearer. Good will ambassador. Policy enforcer. Al Green impersonator. He's half-black. He's half-white. Ramrod. Contortionist. Healer. Divider. Defender of transparency. Master spy. Outlaw. Sheriff. Muslim. Christian. Politician. Citizen. Figurehead. Hood ornament. White hatted hero. Melodramatic villain. A puppet, a poet, a pawn and a king. Even the GOP can't decide if he's a hopeless novice or a demagoguing dictator. The right wing paints him as a radical jihadist while left wing progressives whine he's a cowering conciliator. Making him a little bit Malcolm X and a little bit Urkel. Barack Obama is harder to pin down than an eel in a butter sculpture. A Nobel Peace Prize winner or the Manchurian Candidate. He's either the classiest of cats or Captain Clueless. Relentless shark or a spineless jellyfish. Power mad knight errant or lute strumming eunuch. Or maybe he's all of them. 50 shades of cool. Or drool. Perspective is everything. **Durst's columns are distributed by the Cagle Cartoons Inc. syndicate.**