

# OPINION

OUR VIEW

## Congress can compromise

A bipartisan proposal intended to correct the ills of the Department of Veterans Affairs is good news on several fronts. The bill was approved this week by the United States House, and is expected to be approved by the U.S. Senate at any time before it recesses. Why we like what’s happened with this bill: No. 1, this proposal is receiving bipartisan support. Wow, finally, something — making good on the promise to our veterans to take care of them upon their return home- on which most members of Congress, regardless of party affiliation, can agree. No. 2, this proposal recognizes a discrepancy in services based on where veterans live and aims to mend that problem. The plan allows veterans who live more than 40 miles from one of the nearly 1,000 Veterans Affairs hospitals in the nation to see a private doctor. Clearly, that clause will help Koochiching County’s veterans, many of whom now are forced to travel long distances requiring overnight stays for simple services to be covered. The \$17 billion plan is designed to reduce waiting times for veterans to receive health care services and hire thousands of more doctors and nurses. In addition, the plan will use \$10 billion to secure services from private doctors if veterans reside more than 40 miles from the nearest VA

facility. That latter clause will keep costs under control and focused on the veterans who truly have few other options. This would also be restricted to veterans who have been in the system as of Friday. Many people were shocked and disgusted when it was revealed some veterans had died while waiting for services they should have received as part of the deal America made with them in exchange for their service. That the VA system got to this point is why the proposal allowed the VA secretary authority to immediately fire VA officials who are found to be performing poorly. The bill also cuts annual bonuses for VA employees by \$40 million from last year. Congressional budget analysts estimate the plan will add \$10 billion to federal deficits over the next 10 years. While that’s not something we favor, the changes were not only necessary but morally correct. The approval of this bill proves Congress can reach solutions through compromise on meaningful issues of value to most Americans. However, it’s worrisome it only came after the disturbing and harmful delays in health services for our vets were revealed publicly. We urge members of Congress to consider how to reach compromise on other issues before they reach such disastrous levels.

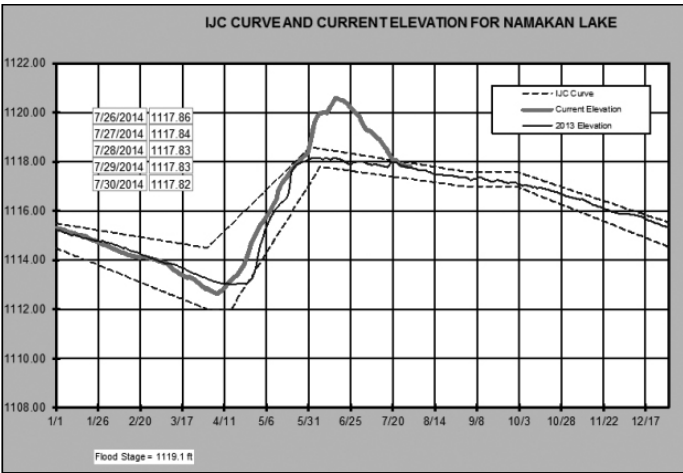


LETTER TO THE EDITOR

## New rule curve could alleviate concerns

**To the editor,**  
The article about the water flow with the bar graphs was informative. However, there is concern when it was stated that if the Namakan chain of waters went up, which consist of Lac LaCroix and the tributaries, the gates would once again be opened and the waters from the Namakan chain would once again flow into Rainy, creating a new flood or the continuation of the present one.

Enclosed are line charts which show the months, the water levels and other information. The line chart shows Namakan water levels receding before our waters crested. It also shows that in the



later part of June, how high the water levels were over the flood state. If you look at the line for the year 2013, you will see that we were at flood stage in the early part of June. This is the month we get

lot of rain, but we were able to control the water, or is it because we had very little rain that we averted a flood. These examples are only a few reasons why we need a new curve. With

the present curve, every May and June we will be asking ourselves, is this going to be an enjoyable summer on or by the lake, or is this going to be another flood summer. Let’s use common sense and make sure the curve is favorable to all the lakes so everyone can have a good summer.

**Albert R. Skurkis Ranier, MN**

*Editor’s Note: Due to space limitations, all the charts included with this letter could not be published. Information on the lakes levels can be found at <http://www.boiseinc.com/boise/about-boise-inc/watershed-borderland-lakes/lake-maps-levels.html>*

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GUEST COLUMN

## Here comes the midterm electionzzzz

BY DICK POLMAN

Those of us who closely follow politics would do well to remember that most Americans are turned off and tuned out — especially in this midterm election year. And that’s a symptom of a seriously sick democracy.

We’re on track for record-low midterm turnout this November, at least based on the voting evidence collected thus far. According to a new report by the non-partisan Center for the Study of the American Electorate, turnout in the first 25 statewide primaries was so anemic — down 18 percent from the early primaries in 2010 — that we’re “likely to witness the lowest midterm primary turnout in history.” These numbers “reflect how deeply citizens are turning away from political engagement.”

Yes, Democrats are ill-enthused this year, and the tepid turnout in Democratic primaries bears that out. But the supposedly energized GOP isn’t living up to its

billing, either. Republican turnout in GOP primaries is down 15 percent from 2010, the peak year of the tea-party wave. The inescapable conclusion is that a record-high percentage of Americans are poised to voice their disgust at the political system by staying home in November.

The reasons should be obvious. Bill Galston, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution and a former Clinton White House adviser, tells NPR, “Gridlock is at an all-time high. The productivity in Congress is at an all-time low, and many Americans are asking themselves, ‘How much difference does it make who the people are, and what the party balance is, if nothing seems to change, election after election?’”

Right now, nothing better illustrates that gridlock than the rhetorical gamesmanship over “impeachment.” The GOP’s agitators — people like Michele Bachmann, Louie Gohmert, Sarah Palin — keep talking it up, and 57 percent of rank-and-file Republicans

support the talk. Meanwhile, Democrats are content to exploit the usual Republican overreach, by talking up the talk in order to raise money. Bottom line: Both sides love to run their mouths, because talking is way easier than getting stuff done.

It’s noteworthy that abysmal primary turnout coincides with an unprecedented outpouring of negative ads, bankrolled by outside groups, and projected to hit a record \$2 billion by November. (For this air pollution, we can again thank the five Republicans on the U.S. Supreme Court, for their Citizens United ruling.) Somehow the electorate just hasn’t been turned on by the negative ad blitz — which is probably the blitzers’ goal; if most folks stay home, only the ideologues will show up to vote.

Indeed, the new report warns that unless the average mainstream citizen becomes re-engaged, our elections (particularly the primaries) will be ever-

increasingly dominated by those ideologues. And that scenario will turn people off even more.

Alas, the report is short on doable solutions. (Aren’t we all?) However, it does believe that many of our woes can be eliminated “if the United States emulated Mexico in creating a biometric national identification card and system,” which would “automatically enfranchise” the 61 million Americans who are unregistered yet eligible to vote.

OK, I’ll go way out on a limb and predict that America will win the World Cup long before it ever cops a policy from the likes of Mexico. A biometric ID card? Rest assured, the House GOP would draft a bill to stop that idea from crossing the border.

**Polman is the national political columnist at NewsWorks/WHYY in Philadelphia (newsworks.org/polman) and a “writer in residence” at the University of Philadelphia.**

### 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@ifallsjournal.com](mailto:laurel@ifallsjournal.com).

### Candidate letter policy

The beginning of 2014 brought a new policy to The Journal. A charge of \$30 will be required to publish letters to the editor from candidates or about candidates. The letters must be 500 words or less and the fee must be paid prior to the letter being published. The name and city of the author will be published with the letter. Letters may be emailed to [laurel@ifallsjournal.com](mailto:laurel@ifallsjournal.com). The Journal will publish a deadline for publication of paid election letters prior to the Aug. 12 primary and Nov. 4 general elections.