

OPINION

FIRST AMENDMENT “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press or the right of people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.”

OUR VIEW

Dayton should sign Timberjay

We, along with many others who believe in open government, urge Gov. Mark Dayton to sign an important piece of legislation unanimously approved last week by both the House and Senate.

Known as the Timberjay bill, Senate File 1770 may not be as sexy as other bills handled at the state Capitol this session, but its significance goes to the heart of government accountability.

The bill would overturn a Minnesota Supreme Court ruling last fall, and reaffirm the right of citizens to information about private businesses that contract with government.

The legislation is rooted in efforts of The Timberjay, a newspaper that serves Cook-Orr, Tower-Soudan and Ely, to get information about a major school construction project. Publisher Marshall Helmberger, concerned about costs and other aspects of a project, asked the school district for certain details about the construction contracts.

The district didn't have these records, and so Helmberger went to the contractor, citing a provision in state law that requires public access to certain information held by a government contractor that shows how the contract is being performed. The contractor, Fortune 500 company Johnson Controls, refused Helmberger's request. The Timberjay sued and won its case before the Minnesota Appeals Court,

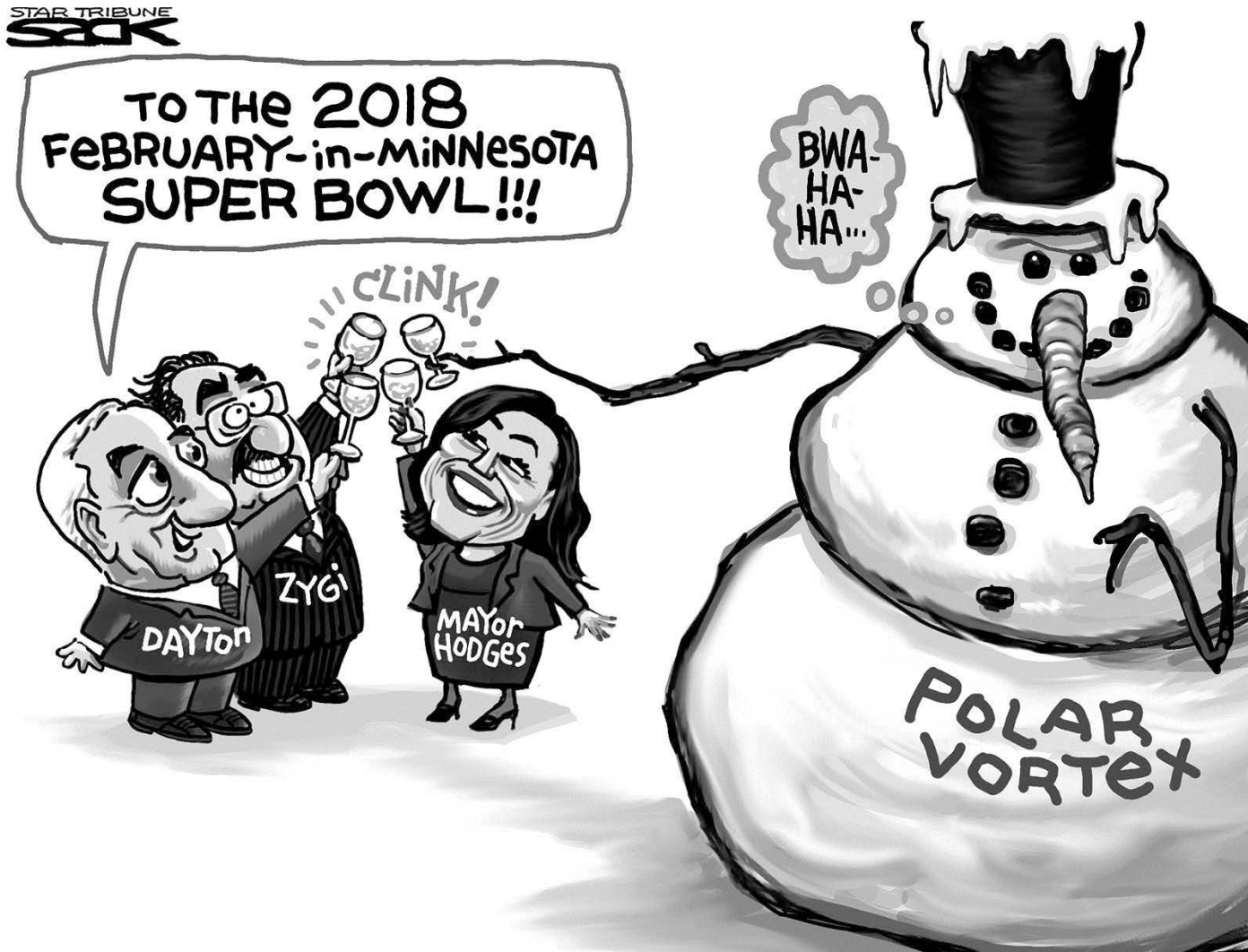
only to have the ruling overturned by the state Supreme Court.

The Timberjay bill seeks to clarify the state's Data Practices Act so there's no question that the public has access to details showing how private companies are performing contracts with government agencies in cases where the agency fails to obtain all of the pertinent information from the contractor.

There's a potential problem, however. Before giving final approval to the bill, the House last week added an amendment dealing with a separate data practices issue involving the state Department of Public Safety. Apparently, the department doesn't like the amendment and may be trying to persuade the governor to veto the whole bill. Such a move would be extremely unfortunate. The public benefits of the Timberjay bill itself far outweigh whatever minor issues the public safety amendment may entail.

In every community in the state you can find examples of private companies doing business with government agencies. The Timberjay dispute, at its core, epitomizes the everyday efforts of reporters and taxpayers to ensure that public business – in this case, the spending of billions of public dollars – is open to the scrutiny of the public.

The Timberjay bill should be signed by Dayton so this important goal can be achieved.



LETTER TO THE EDITOR

A second appraisal is needed

To the editor,

The Donahue transaction with the city of International Falls just won't go away until the city rides itself of this "hippopotamus deal." If our city council doesn't go along with the recommendation of the mayor and have this property reappraised and brought back to the table, then a different method of dealing should be approached.

Our city councilors have a fiduciary responsibility to the tax payers of International Falls. It is very apparent that with this deal and the opposition to it, their responsibilities are coming into question.

The simple fact that there is an appraisal of \$1.8 million and a separate county appraisal of just under \$400,000 on this property, one must ask the question, why the large difference of \$1,400,000? If our councilors turn their heads and do not deal with this, then it is time for the Attorney General's Office, Department of Commerce to get involved. Mr. Frank Bigelow of Bigelow Appraisals better have some good reasons why there is a \$1.4 million difference in appraised value. There is a state agency that oversees appraisers and their licenses. Maybe a trip to the state Capitol is in order.

This transaction does not pass the "smell test" at all. The taxpayers' money is at stake here. Our councilors should readdress this issue and make it fair and equitable for the sake of the taxpayers.

George Koeneman
International Falls, MN

Government intrusion on business

To the editor,

The spotlight on blasting has been interesting and even more interesting is the lack of anyone from the county board contacting Bowman Construction to discuss their concerns.

We are lucky to have a company in International Falls with 80 years of experience in blasting and quarrying. Development is expensive; having a rock quarry with a clear safety record is a benefit to all.

We own and pay taxes on 400 acres allowing us to be removed from buildings and business; we have invested our lives and millions of dollars to build a business and education to meet and exceed regulations.

The Journal article states "Changing the regulations would allow the county more control." Control over what and whom? We know a lot about blasting and being a privately run business with zero claims we do not need the county to have control of us.

Other blasting organizations have placed some issues on the radar for citizens. The sheriff and Dale Olson (county environmental services director) were called many times to the overpass quarry. Rocks raining on the tracks and overpass, holes blown in the inspection building. The county themselves blew a cabin in the water during a blast. We should not have to pay the price for others' inexperience or incidents. We have 80 vehicles, a computerized scale, asphalt plant, concrete plant, offices, shops — all remain present during our operations without incident.

Businesses depend on our business to continue to run their business.

We have 60 people who depend on their job to support families, kids in schools, pay taxes. With the recent layoffs, can Koochiching County lose more residents? For sale signs are on every street. Can we afford to have the county control a business that has operated for 80 years without incident? The grandfather clause was built on the Fifth Amendment rights to limit governments' unjustified power over business that has been in existence despite changes in future regulations.

If we allow changes to be made without proof and are willing to give up our rights to protect ourselves from government involving themselves in our ability to run private business we all should worry. Go with caution — citizens of Koochiching, you could be next.

To allow three citizens with no legitimate claims at the board meeting who all reside over a mile away to speak for everyone and allow them to change the way we do business should concern all citizens.

Our season is short. We have work to do at Bowman Construction so our roads can be built and families fed. Rights are something we all need to fight for.

Debbie Bowman
International Falls, MN

How to contact your lawmakers

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WHAT OTHERS SAY

Come on, say it: Radical Islam

The outpouring of national outrage over the bizarre and really barbaric act of kidnapping and planning to sell about 300 girls by a radical Islamic terrorist group in Nigeria is more than understandable.

If there was anything less of a response we should put our collective American psyche on the couch for thorough examination.

But, unfortunately, while shocking, it should not be that much of a surprise.

Radical Islam is very much alive and very much active in pushing its brutal agenda, which includes what is a real "War on Women," not some contrived and excessive buzz phrase made up by Democrats in the U.S. strictly for political purposes to try to tar those who may not agree with their views on issues such as government support for birth control and abortion rights.

And this is happening in Nigeria _ a country that has provided a far too comfortable home for the Islamic terrorist group Boko Haram.

Nigeria is a corrupt country whose leaders are much more concerned with their own bank accounts than the well-being of their people.

Case in point: What happened to \$20 billion in oil revenue from the country's Central Bank over an 18-month period? Well, the Central Bank's governor will not be able to get to the bottom of that question. He was ousted by Nigerian President Goodluck (gotta love that appropriate name) Jonathan as he started to hit

too close to home during his investigation. He's lucky to still be alive.

So a corrupt country in Africa has helped to fuel a terrorist Islamic organization that is now holding about 270 girls as ransom for release of some terrorists.

Meanwhile, a hashtag social media/pop culture-"selfie" craze has been ignited to "Bring Back Our Girls."

It's certainly all well and good to focus the too short-lived attention span of today's society on a terrible wrong being wrought on these girls in Nigeria — so keeping something important in the national conversation is a good thing.

But all the hastags and "selfies" of the world aren't going to warm the hearts of these cold-blooded killers. The Boko Haram couldn't care less about "selfies" — unless they are in them — or Twitter — unless it's used to get their hate-filled messages out—or, oh so sadly, the lives of the 270 girls or really of any females.

So go ahead, hashtag away.

But what's really needed is a realization at the highest levels of government in the United States and other nations of freedom that radical Islamic terrorism is an evil which we cannot, nor should not, ever deal with in negotiations. And looking away will not make it go away. That will only allow it to continue its growth like a terminal cancer.

Mesabi Daily News,
May 12

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.