

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

Aiming for a better future

Any program designed to help Borderland families address problems involving children before intervention is needed deserves support.

The Parent Support Outreach Program, or PSOP, will soon be implemented in Koochiching County. Key to the program is its voluntary participation by families who may need some assistance that could ultimately help in avoiding other, more intrusive assistance by county and state officials.

Many of us may have witnessed a behavior or an incident that causes concern about the welfare of a child. In most cases, it’s an isolated incident that requires no action. But some of us may have seen something that raises red flags and have felt compelled to call county officials to ask if something can be done. Unless certain standards are met, county officials cannot get involved in many cases until something else, often a more alarming incident, occurs.

PSOP will allow county officials to follow up with eligible families

with assistance that will connect them to resources that will help them learn how to create healthy, nurturing homes, to reach out to family and friends for support, and to access local services that can build a foundation to address needs that aren’t now being met.

PSOP workers meet with families who accept the services, assess family needs and strengths and together make decisions about what services or resources can be accessed to provide support.

Families experiencing poverty, chemical dependency and other negative issues can often lessen the risk of requiring the services of child protection workers if they receive services to help them address those issues.

And requiring less assistance or intervention by county officials may help to lessen the case loads county social workers now handle. And that’s good for everyone.

A community gains strength and stability when its families and children are healthy, well rounded and productive members. PSOP is a good start toward this end.



LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Common sense vs. renewable energy

To the editor,

In February of 2007 Gov. Tim Pawlenty signed into law Minnesota’s Renewable Energy Act, which requires that by the year 2025 a full 25 percent of energy used in Minnesota must come from a renewable resource.

Since that time we have seen wind tower generators, photoelectric cells, geothermal heating and cooling systems and more installed.

What we have not seen is the cost associated with these systems. To be sure, some systems, such as geothermal heating and cooling for homes, have become economically viable. While others, such as wind farms and solar generation, remain cost prohibitive.

Our utilities are adding a surcharge to our power bills to defray some of the cost for wind generation. Investor owned utilities, such as Minnesota Power / ALLETE, are paying a tax to pay for solar rebates, which means that you the consumer are actually paying for it.

I am going to give you an example of the lack of viability of solar energy. This can be verified by looking at the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources website.

Between 2010 and 2013 the Minnesota DNR installed solar energy panels at 23 of its locations throughout the state.

Total cost \$1,615,359. Average cost \$70,233 per installation. Average output 13.2

percent / generation capacity.

Average 72.63 years/ simple payback

By any stretch of the imagination this would not be considered an effective use of taxpayer money. One would get the feeling that our state government sees taxpayers as a never ending money supply and they have the right to do what they want with our money. Yes, you read that correctly, our money. It does not belong to the federal, state, county, city government or the school boards. It is taken from the taxpayer to support projects which are necessary for the good of all of us. And when the decisions have been made to invest in infrastructure, they need to be made using

sound business principles.

A common sense approach to our energy needs would go a long way toward getting all of us where we want to be.

Clean affordable energy is possible and just around the corner; all we need is for government and industry to work together.

2014 is an election year. We have an opportunity to put in place elected officials who will listen to “We the People” rather than party bosses. Once they are in place we need to hold them accountable to follow our wishes.

Stand up, make your voice heard and bring some common sense back to our government.

Bruce Sampson  
Ray, MN

PAID ELECTION LETTER

Let’s start with smarter taxes

To the editor,

My campaign for Minnesota House of Representatives here in District 3A is based on my “Vote Smart” platform. This platform includes the concepts of smarter taxes and smarter government. Let’s start with smarter taxes. The flawed ideology of mindless spending and increased taxing has to stop. Throwing our precious financial resources down the black hole of bureaucracy is both irresponsible and unsustainable.

Last year, our state legislators handed us the largest tax increase in Minnesota history raising \$2.1 billion in new taxes and the biggest budget in history. That averages to an increase of \$1,000 for every household in Minnesota. Our legislators say the

budget is balanced, but that’s only if we exclude \$10 billion in federal subsidies, ignore tens of billions in unfunded pension liabilities and pretend that we don’t have to pay off the billions of dollars of outstanding state bonds. For the budget to be balanced, we also have to ignore all dedicated funding like the gas taxes, lottery profits and fees like snowmobile licenses and fishing licenses. This over taxation produced a surplus of over a billion dollars. This is somewhat embarrassing for the legislators, outrageous for us taxpayers and problematic for those hoping to be reelected. In a recent Journal article, Rep. Dave Dill neglected to mention that the massive surplus was the result of taxes he voted for last

year. He would like us to believe that the windfall came from an improving economy.

Many vocal citizens are calling for the entire huge surplus to be returned to those who were over taxed. Our legislators have been busy explaining why they couldn’t possibly give us our money back. They have big plans for it; they always do.

Since this is an election year, over the past weeks some smoke and mirrors were used to provide what is being billed as a tax relief plan. It is nothing of the sort. A few of the more egregious taxes — that our legislators voted for last year — that were detrimental to business, and in turn jobs, are now being repealed and we are asked to believe that we are getting tax relief. The

repealed taxes give us back about 25¢ on the overtaxed dollar. Oh my.

Passing a tax one year, driving business out of the state and then repealing it the next year makes no sense. What a waste of time and energy not to mention the jobs that these taxes drove out of Minnesota.

We need to elect state officials whose best interest is our best interest here in rural Minnesota. They need to do their job and represent not only the people that voted for them but all the people in their district. In November, let’s do better. Get to know your candidates and their records on voting for higher taxes. “Vote Smart” and vote Eric Johnson for Minnesota House 3A.

Eric Johnson  
International Falls, MN

WHAT OTHERS SAY

**Drone regulations filled with pitfalls**

The use of drones is about to explode.

Lawmakers...are beginning to look at how to regulate the unmanned flying units. It’s a needed discussion that’s fraught with danger.

Most want legislation that would require law enforcement officials to be granted a warrant before using drones in investigations. While there is general agreement on requiring warrants, even limits on government use can

have unintended consequences. Washington state lawmakers passed a bill that limits government use of drones, but also limits the public’s right to government information. The law says images taken from a government drone must not allow the disclosure of “personal information” that “describes, locates or indexes anything about a person.”

That would mean that a government drone taking images of a wildfire couldn’t be shown to the public if a car or person or private property might be

identifiable, even though those same images are currently public records if the government shoots the images from a helicopter flying over a wildfire. Such limits on the public’s right to access government information is unacceptable.

...Even the current use of drones for commercial purposes is in flux. The FAA has taken the stance hobbyists can legally fly drones, but not those who use them for paid commercial use. But a federal judge this month ruled that commercial use of drones is

legal. ... the FAA is to have guidelines in place by next year for commercial use...

More controversial will be any laws limiting the use of drones by individuals or businesses. ...there will be privacy issues...: Private investigators tracking people, drones peering... onto private property, and activists using them to expose problems...

Texas legislators proposed a bill to ban aerial photography from remote vehicles, and privacy groups have petitioned for every drone flight to require FAA approval.

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