

# OPINION

OUR VIEW

## Five members is best choice

Increasing the number of members on a school board when there doesn't seem to be much interest in serving on the board doesn't make sense.

Voters will be asked if they favor increasing the number of members on the International Falls School Board from six to seven in a special election in conjunction with the Nov. 4 general election.

On a 3-2 vote Monday, the board agreed to take the question to voters. The motivation behind the referendum is to establish an odd number of board member in an effort to avoid tie votes.

Recent history has shown the Falls School Board split on several very important decisions, including in selection of a district superintendent.

We must agree with board member Darrell Wagner, who voted against the motion. Wagner said just one person has filed for one of the three seats that will be vacated at the end of December. And it just doesn't make sense to up the number of board members when little interest has been shown by the public in serving on the board.

Instead, we favor a five-member board, which is a more manageable number for discussions, debate and decisions.

Board Chairman Gordy Dault, who also supports a five-member board, has said he looked into the idea of a five-member board, but believes the need for legislation would be a roadblock.

At this late date, the seven-member board question will be taken to voters in November. But depending on the outcome, the board may still want to pursue that legislative avenue for change. And more information about the legislative process to decrease the number of members to five is needed to fully understand that course of action.

As the entity legally charged with governing the school district, each school board is responsible to its community to govern efficiently and effectively, states the Minnesota School Board Association in its description of the role of the school board.

To effectively achieve this goal, the International Falls School Board has put into action a plan that will assist them by seating an odd number of members.

While we encourage voters to carefully consider the ballot question, we do believe the best course of action would be to seek the needed legislation to seat a five-member board.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## Chamber expects officials to work together

To the editor,

Dear city officials:

The Chamber supports and deems valuable all economic developments which fortify the prospects of creating jobs and growth for the area. This support is advocated in the best interests of the Chamber membership, the business environment and our community – all of which benefit from the fruition of economic development

projects. Likewise, all will bear the economic consequences should potential endeavors not get the focus and chance for success they deserve.

Issued with its support is the Chamber's expectation that elected and non-elected officials will work together through whatever collaborative means necessary to advance the potentials for development. Unfortunately, cooperation and teamwork have

not recently been evident within our city government. The Chamber asserts that citizens and the stakeholders in our community deserve from our leaders the highest level of cooperation toward the facilitation and realization of economic success. The Chamber urges officials and leaders to use their important roles in our community to first and foremost

advocate for the economic interests of the whole.

**The International Falls Area Chamber of Commerce**  
**Faye Whitbeck,**  
**President**

**Editor's note:** This letter was sent by the International Falls Area Chamber of Commerce board of directors to the International Falls city officials. It was also signed by the 12 members of the board.

### How to contact your lawmakers

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To the editor,

Over 100 years ago, two significant events occurred: the construction of a paper mill and the damming of Rainy River. With vast acres of timber to support the mill, good jobs and Rainy Lake, how could International Falls do anything but grow and prosper?

Fast forward to the 21st century where the population is approaching half of what it once was and “For Sale” signs outnumber election signs.

This begs the question: Have the City Council's

decisions over the past few years served the residents of International Falls; the people who shovel the snow, open their shop doors every morning, clock in at the mill, drive the streets, raise their kids, mow the lawns and pay their fees and taxes?

Or, have residents been burdened by decisions based on an egotistical, grandiose vision of the future, such as: three costly, failed lawsuits and the acquisition of overvalued land?

Then, consider the latest — a proposed city sales

tax that would make it even tougher for existing businesses and affect year-round residents in and outside of the city limits much more than Canadians or tourists.

And, what's behind the effort to demean Mayor Bob Anderson? Is it his ongoing support of the city charter — the document that spells out the rules and regulations for those who conduct the policies and actions of city government?

If so, any councilor who views the charter and city ordinances as obsolete can institute changes through

legal methods, rather than ignoring or treating them as an inconvenience or something to bypass.

The councilors need to follow a simple rule for any future decision. It's called the “stink” test. If the decision they're contemplating doesn't improve the everyday life of the people paying the bills, it stinks.

**Judy Blais**  
**Summer Lake, OR**  
**Editor's Note:** Blais is a former staff member of The Daily Journal and now spends summers on Rainy Lake.

WHAT OTHERS SAY

**Parents, stop distracting your teen drivers**

New research about distracted driving by teenagers provides some sobering news most parents probably won't want to admit.

First, they — yes, parents — are the No. 1 cellphone distraction for teen drivers. Second, most parents make lousy role models when it comes to ignoring distractions while driving.

The first finding is the most important and easiest to fix. Moms and dads, don't call your kids when you know they are driving.

Unfortunately, a study presented last week to the American Psychological Association showed parents aren't doing that. When 400 drivers ages 15-18 were asked

who calls them the most when driving, 53 percent said their parents. That compares with 46 percent who reported talking to friends.

Again, moms and dads, don't call (or text!) your kids when they are behind the wheel. If you do call and your teen says they are driving, hang up! Why? Safety first, followed by adhering to the law!

As a report last year by the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration showed, distracted driving is a leading cause of crashes among drivers of all ages. For teens specifically, 21 percent of fatal crashes involved cellphones.

It's also important to remember in Minnesota it is illegal for drivers younger

than 18 to answer a cellphone while driving or in traffic.

Of course, main reasons this research found teens take calls while driving is their parents.

Among their reasons is their perception it's either OK to take calls from their parents or their parents will be mad if they do not answer. (In fact, some teen respondents noted parents keep calling back if they do not answer.)

Also, these teens, who came from 31 states, reiterated findings from previous research that showed parents are terrible role models.

Indeed, a growing body of research has proven this to be true. For example, a 2012 survey by the University of Michigan and Toyota found

that parents who more frequently engage in distracted driving have teen drivers who engage in distracting behaviors more frequently than their peers who drive.

No wonder this latest study included comments from teen respondents along the lines of “everybody is doing it,” including mom and dad making and taking calls and texts.

For the sake of their children's safety, parents need to do a better job on two fronts. First, don't call your kids if you know they are driving. Second, don't use your phone while driving. Failing on both fronts might just kill you and your kids.

**St. Cloud Times,**  
**Aug. 14**

### 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.

### 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. The Journal will publish a deadline for publication of paid election letters prior to the Aug. 12 primary and Nov. 4 general elections.