

OPINION

OUR VIEW

Looking to the future

If only speculating on the future was as clear as hindsight is said to be, this community might be a different place to live, work and play.

Looking forward with a clear view has become even more difficult with the plan by Boise Inc. to cut 265 jobs at the company’s paper mill, the largest employer in the area that serves as the anchor to the community’s economy.

And while we believe that the International Falls City Council had only the best intentions for this community’s future when it accepted a 125-acre donation from the Donahue Family Trust, it may be time to consider whether we can truly afford this gift into the future.

We knew the gift provided to the city by the family in 2009 came with an agreement that carried a price tag: \$90,000 in brokerage fees paid to a brokerage firm and a guarantee to build a first-class trail and a monument to the family.

But it makes sense now to consider an appraisal that set the value of the property at \$1.8 million, upon which the brokerage fees are based, and determine if it was and remains accurate, especially knowing that Koochiching County set the value of the property for taxable purposes at about \$400,000.

While delaying payment of this year’s annual \$15,000 portion of the brokerage fee may have risked a lawsuit against the city, we believe it’s important to open talks with Matt Donahue, a member of the family trust, about points in the agreement moving forward. And those talks should occur while

members of this community are invited July 31 to weigh in with their thoughts about how, and possibly if, the property should be developed by the city.

The 125 undeveloped acres bordered by the Rainy River and Falls Country Club obviously have value. But a true picture of that value to the city, and the costs to annex and extend water and sewer to the property in the future, ought to be determined while the public gives comments about a plan for the property.

In the best, or maybe better, of times, which may have been 2009, the brokerage fees may have been a good use of city money. And had the economy remained healthy, sitting on the land until a private developer was interested may have been a good plan.

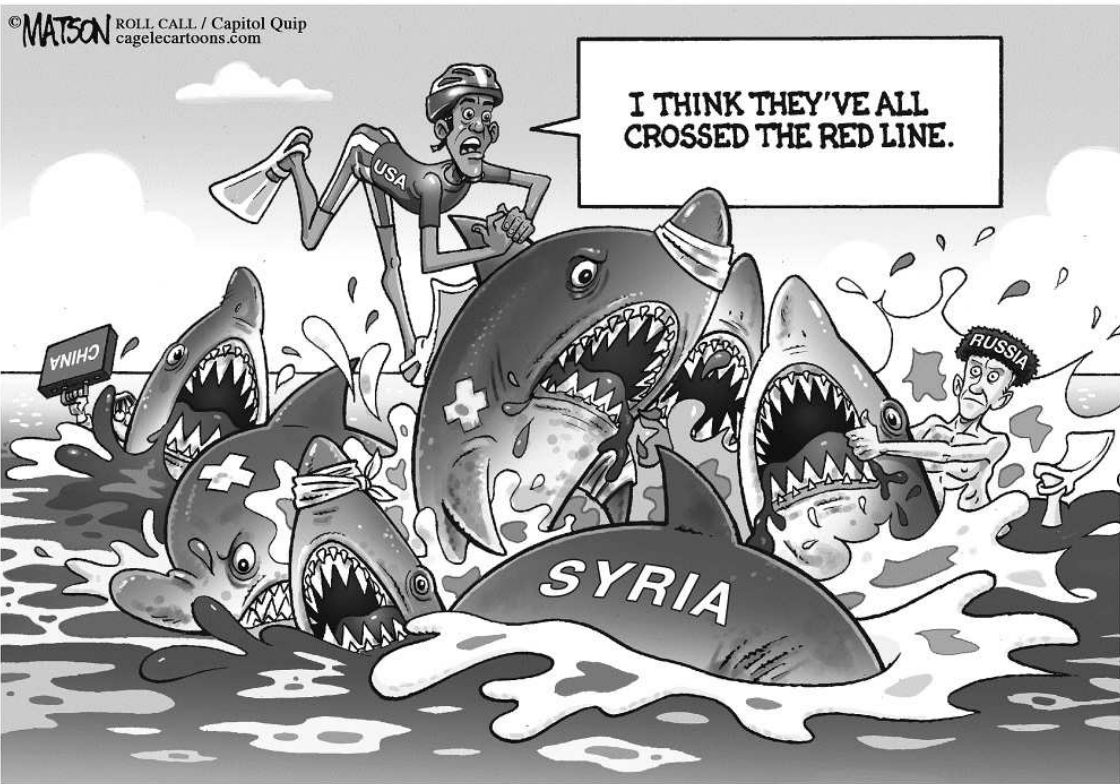
But, as Minnesota boy-made-good Bob Dylan has said, times, they are a changin’. And the reduction in jobs at the paper mill, and a related loss in spending in the community by the families and others affected, may have changed the game when it comes to speculation.

We, too, believed that the donation of land to the city was a benefit at the time. We said so in this space in 2009.

But city officials must now plan for a worst-case scenario and there may be a better use of those funds at this point.

We say plan for the worst by opening talks with Donahue about the requirements in the agreement, get a new appraisal, and hope for the best-case scenario — that new jobs and opportunities will come that will make this a moot discussion.

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.”



GUEST COLUMN

Be careful what you wish for

The U.S. Supreme Court must love the nightlife, because they just struck down the Defense of Marriage Act and invalidated California’s Proposition 8, which set off parties in every major city in the America. They were dancing in the streets so long and hard it was raining men... and women. 10,000 kudos to all our friends in the LGBT community for finally upgrading out of societal steerage into economy.

You have survived. Your hearts must be so over the rainbow, both the hearts and the rainbows are having babies right now. Cakes are being baked and balloons blown in your honor as we speak. You are one notarized slip of paper away from joining the heterosexual world in holy matrimony. Congratulations. You now have the legal right to be as miserable as the rest of us.

So sorry you had to wait. The deal is, a lot of bitter old people had to die first. You know. Tiny-brained folks that went to their last dance still believing professional wrestling is legitimate. So maybe this time, the answer to your question “do you really want to hurt me” will be a resoundingly choral “no.”

But that is nothing more than wet towels on the shower floor at the YMCA now, because



Will DURST
RAGING MODERATE

you are within a hair’s breadth of becoming intimate with the blessed institution of marriage. You are family — almost. And many have shown interest in voluntary commitment to that institution. Good luck. But be careful what you wish for. Don’t want to rain on your parade, but you’ve just entered the wild and wacky world of unintended consequences.

A quick and dirty primer for the wedding deprived:

#1. Bigamy is the crime of having one spouse too many. The same has often been said of monogamy.

#2. When you see a married couple holding hands, chances are it’s to keep from strangling each other.

#3. In the beginning, marriage is a noun. Later on, it’s a sentence.

#4. After a few years, the only thing most couples have in common is they were married

on the same day.
#5. Marriage may be a blessed sacrament, but so are the last rites.

And don’t forget, as beautiful and sacred as the start of a marriage can be, that’s how ugly and grotesque the ending can get. The bad news is 50 percent of all marriages end in divorce. The good news is the other 50 percent end in death. There’s truth in the old adage that the reason divorces are so expensive is because they’re worth it.

Alimony. Child support. In-laws. Headaches. Jealousy, betrayal, money. Hair in the sink. Puce cabinets. All that to look forward to: plus you are in imminent danger of experiencing direct contact with lawyers. The remakes of that 1934 Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire classic, “The Gay Divorcee” will be legion. But you will make even divorce look fabulous.

So, right now, relax. Tell yourself, “I’m too sexy for any downer talk.” Take a walk on the wild side because you’re coming out to be Dancing Queens and Kings, Just wake me up before you go-go. Her name was Lola. She was a showgirl. Sorry. Couldn’t figure out how to slip that in. And what the hell, join the Navy.

Will Durst distributed by the Cagle Cartoons Inc. syndicate.

GUEST COLUMN

State leaders say one thing, do the opposite

New taxes took effect Monday

BY DAVID C. OLSON

Minnesotans, prepare to dig deeper into your pocketbooks following actions of the 2013 Legislature. Companies are being asked to pay a very high premium for the privilege of doing business in Minnesota. Many changes in tax law take effect July 1 and many are retroactive to January 1. These new taxes include individual income tax, corporate taxes, sales taxes, estate and gift taxes, and cigarette taxes.

The pyramid effect of these higher, and often hidden, costs is certain to be felt across the state and negatively impact Minnesota economy and business competitiveness. The Minnesota Chamber of Commerce seeks to lower all of these costs. We support the call for a special session for immediate repeal of the B2B taxes:

■ Labor service charges for repair and maintenance of business equipment and machines, including farm equipment, effective Monday.

■ Purchases of telecommunications equipment by telecommunications providers, effective Monday.

■ Storage and warehousing services of business-related goods, effective April 1, 2014.

Minnesota businesses will pay the 6.875 percent state sales tax, plus any local sales tax, on these services if you hire the work out. The cost especially hits small and midsize businesses that don’t have the in-house expertise.

The impact, without a doubt, will take a toll. Affected companies will be placed at an extreme disadvantage with their peers in other states and nations. Consumers will pay the price through higher costs for goods and services; employees will feel the impact through lower wages and lost jobs.

B2B taxes are not only misguided fiscal policy, but they are at cross-purposes with legislative goals to promote economic growth. Consider these actions taken by the 2013 Legislature:

A Job Creation Fund of \$24 million was created to encourage industries – including storage and warehouse services and the businesses that use them – to locate in Minnesota. The B2B tax puts this industry at an extreme disadvantage, and without a healthy warehousing industry, Minnesota is less attractive for the businesses that require this service.

Purchases of capital equipment will now be exempt from the sales tax rather than forcing companies to apply for tax refunds. That’s good. But now labor costs for repairing and maintaining the equipment are subject to sales tax.

The governor’s Broadband Task Force recommended keeping the current exemption, and the Legislature allocated, \$500,000 to create a broadband development office to encourage investment of high-tech equipment and capacity in Minnesota. Yet the B2B tax was extended to telecommunications equipment, making it more expensive for providers to expand the state’s telecommunications infrastructure.

The fact is, we did not even need the new tax to solve the budget. The Legislature faced a \$627 million short-term problem and solved it by raising \$2.3 billion in taxes. There is plenty of opportunity for the governor and lawmakers to correct their misguided actions by focusing on spending reductions.

Owners and managers are tired of hearing our leaders promote a “pro-jobs” agenda, then pass “anti-business” legislation. In contrast, neighboring states are knocking on our doors, saying, “We are open for business” and backing it up with their policy decisions. These high and punitive taxes are making it harder and harder for our Minnesota businesses to ignore the welcoming invitations from other states. Let’s do the right thing and repeal these B2B taxes before we lose important businesses and jobs.

Olson is president of the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce – www.mnchamber.com.

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 (TEMPORARY)
Gerald W. Heaney Federal Building and United States Courthouse
515 West First Street, Room 235
Duluth, MN 55802
218-464-5095, 5096, 5097 and 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 Bakke
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

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