

# OPINION

OUR VIEW

## More info is needed

Knowledge is power; a lack of it creates fear.

The fear of the unknown must be tackled by the leaders of the local hospital once an affiliation with Duluth-based Essentia Health is legally severed.

Several members of the Rainy Lake Medical Center Board, representing the former Falls Memorial Hospital trustees, and the hospital's interim CEO told the Koochiching County Board last week details of proposals exchanged between the Rainy Lake Medical Center Board and Essentia Health are expected to be released to the public once an “unwind” of the affiliation of the local hospital is completed.

We hope an understanding of those proposals will allow this community to work together toward a prosperous and convenient hospital that provides the services this community needs.

Toward that effort, a member of the RLMC Board offered a guest column and the board purchased an advertisement, both of which were published in The Journal last week.

The future of the hospital is now in the hands of the seven

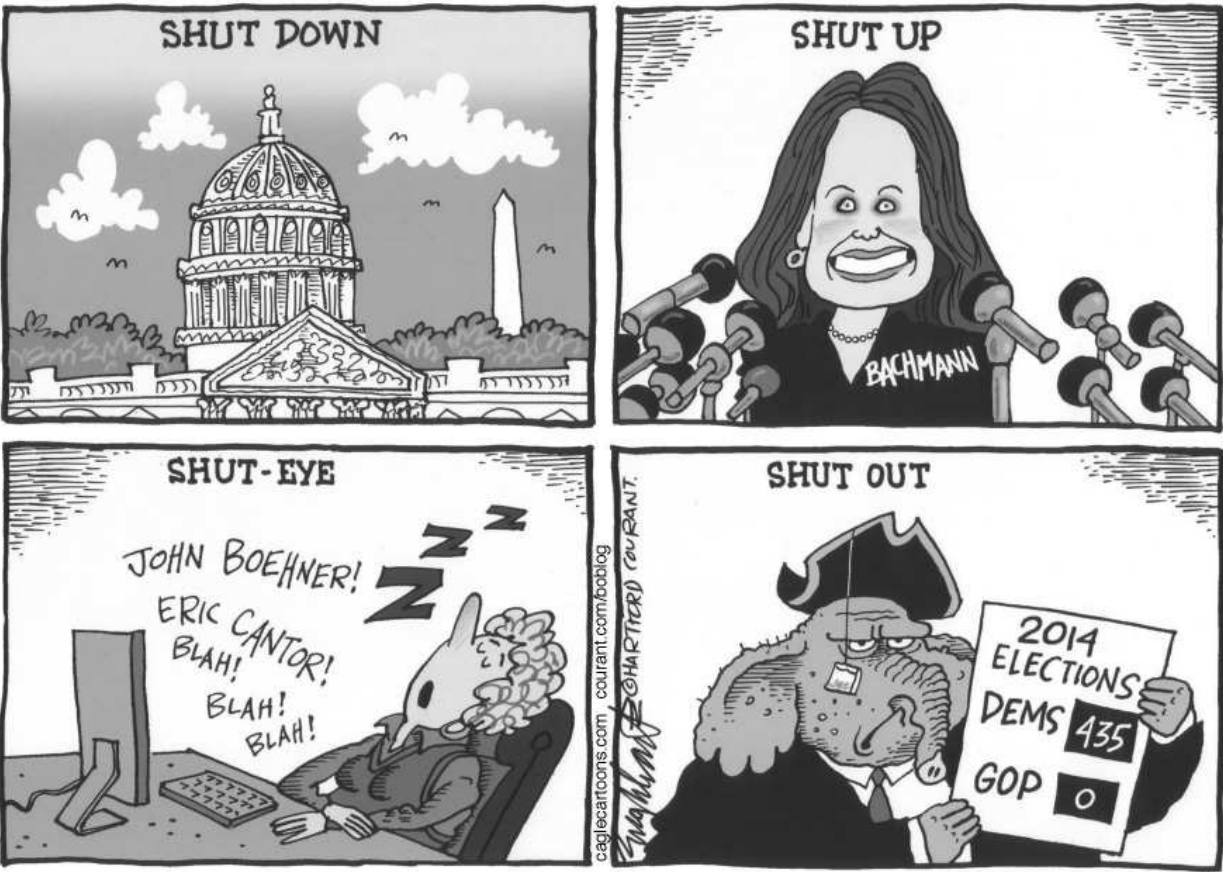
former FMH trustees and the hospital's officers. Some of those members told the county board they believe the community will be pleased with the plans moving forward for an independent hospital.

They said the future is bright, finances are positive and work has begun to bring to Borderland necessary hospital services.

We all want to agree and believe they are right. But, as county commissioners told them, the lack of transparency in negotiations caused concern in the community. The confidentiality agreements that bound members of the RLMC Board added to the worries about the future of medical care.

Members of the community not privy to the closed negotiations don't know all the details of the issues involved, and so were forced to rely on the “he said, she said” offerings of both sides carried in local news media.

Clearly, more information is needed to quell this community's fears. And we welcome the time we can bring this necessary and valuable information to our readers.



## Local hungry need United Way

### Falls Hunger Coalition needs up, funding down

At Falls Hunger Coalition, we rely on funds we receive from United Way of Northeastern Minnesota to provide our two voucher programs called Fruit Bucks and Senior Select.

We distribute Fruit Bucks to our clients with children 18 and under in the amount of \$10 for the first child in a household and \$5 per each additional child. These vouchers are spent at our local grocers for fresh fruit and vegetables and cost FHC between \$700 and \$900 each month. Senior Select targets people 60+ years of age who receive \$15 per single member household or \$20 for two people in a home. The vouchers may be spent at the local grocers for the purchase of fresh fruit, fresh vegetables, and dairy products and costs FHC between \$1,900.00 and \$2,100 per month. For the past several years United Way Grant Funding has been the major supporter of these programs. These programs provide essential nutritional food for those in need in Koochiching County. If United Way funding was not available we would have to reduce dollar value of the vouchers available to households, or in the worst case scenario, eliminate the programs.

United Way's focus is to improve the lives of all.



Nancy ANDERSON  
GUEST COMMENTARY

Everyone in our community benefits from the wellbeing of all residents. In FHC's specific areas of support, children receive better nutrition; in turn that plays a role in health and education. The same is true for our senior population — with better nutrition available, our seniors improve their overall health and wellbeing.

United Way's positive impact in Koochiching County is widespread. The organization focuses on basic needs, food and shelter, as well as education, reading programs for children, support for people in abusive situations, just to name a few. The community support from United Way for the many local nonprofit organizations working toward improving the life of Koochiching County is in a word — critical.

Our community has recently lost 265 well-paying jobs. The trickle-down effect will most definitely be felt at the basic level of food for the family. Those of us who have more than enough to fill our needs might find it challenging to

### LIVE UNITED



#### United Way of Northeastern MN

empathize with our neighbors and friends that are struggling. However, it is more important than ever for those with enough to share with those in need. Even a minimal paycheck deduction to United Way will have a direct and positive impact on our community. In addition to encouraging you to support United Way, you also may choose which organization you want your funding to support. As a reminder, everything raised in our community stays in our community.

Falls Hunger Coalition's overall funding is down by 17 percent, while our operating and food expenses are up by 8 percent. All donations to United Way, small or large, help our community. Please give generously to the 2013 campaign. Our community is truly counting on you. Thank you in advance.

Please consider contributing through United Way to help our community. If you would like to send in a gift, please mail your contribution to UWNEMN, c/o Julie Ehrman, 1303 16th Street, International Falls, MN 56649.

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### 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.

### 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@ifalls-journal.com.

### WHAT OTHERS SAY

#### FEDERAL GOVERNMENT, TAKE LESSON FROM CITIES

If the federal government is “Big Brother,” it sure could take a lesson from its smaller Central Minnesota siblings in setting budgets this fall for the next fiscal year.

Amid a partial federal shut-down and looming debt-ceiling debate — all driven by budgets — at the federal level, witness these recent local budgeting developments:

- St. Cloud's proposed 2014 budget is \$67.46 million, a 3.6 percent decrease in planned spending compared with 2013.
- St. Joseph approved a \$1.67 million levy, down about 2.9 percent from this year's \$1.72 million level.
- Sauk Rapids proposed keeping its levy the same, \$3.57 million.
- Sartell is looking to boost its levy 2 percent.
- And Waite Park is raising its levy about 6.7 percent.

Federal elected officials take

note: Whether these communities are spending less money or more money, whether taxes are going up or down, each is still doing what it takes to balance their respective budgets.

There's no “shutdown-showdown, my-way-or-the-highway” grandstanding. There's just a concerted effort to be as efficient and effective with the public's money as possible.

Again, look at St. Cloud. Yes, an increase of more than \$11.5 million in the state's Local Government Aid program is providing welcome help for 2014. But city leaders — elected and professional — also have done a commendable job of managing local tax dollars, especially in some really rough budgetary years.

As the Sept. 29 Times news report “Turning the Corner” noted, since 2008 the city budget has shrunk about 16 percent. Even the 2014 budget spends less than the current budget.

Admittedly, those decreases caused some challenges. City

staff size dropped, services were cut and projects delayed as St. Cloud (and most other area cities) struggled with the Great Recession. But unlike the federal government, elected and professional leaders put the priority on serving constituents, not political agendas.

That's not to say there are not (and were not) challenges.

For example, even amid plans to spend less next year, St. Cloud Mayor Dave Kleis has said four police officers will be added, plus the proposed budget adds staff to the fire department. And in Waite Park, city leaders are asking residents to pay more in taxes so road projects delayed in those recent hard times can be completed now that the economy has stabilized.

In theory, such decisions should be no big deal. After all, they reflect sound fiscal management. And if the littler brothers and sisters can pull that off, why can't Big Brother?

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