

OPINION

OUR VIEW

Surviving the struggle

What’s the answer to too much cold and not enough money for heat?

We’re not sure, but we’re glad local leaders understand the issues that it may cause now and in the future and are considering ways to help.

KOOTASCA’s Dana Herschbach drove the point home when he met with local leaders at the Koochiching County Board meeting.

While recent increases in energy assistance emergency funds are a step in the right direction, Herschbach said the effort is simply a three to six week bandage for most households.

“The real crisis lies ahead for those who have exhausted assistance resources and are unable to pay on their own,” said Herschbach.

He urged local leaders to consider what to do should a number of Borderland residents run out of heat. Where will they be housed?

And while there are no easy answers, we’re glad that local Fire Chief Jerry Jensen is urging people to keep safety in mind as they attempt to use alternative heat sources in an effort to stay warm. We urge people to heed Jensen’s advice about the need to properly place working smoke detectors and carbon monoxide alarms.

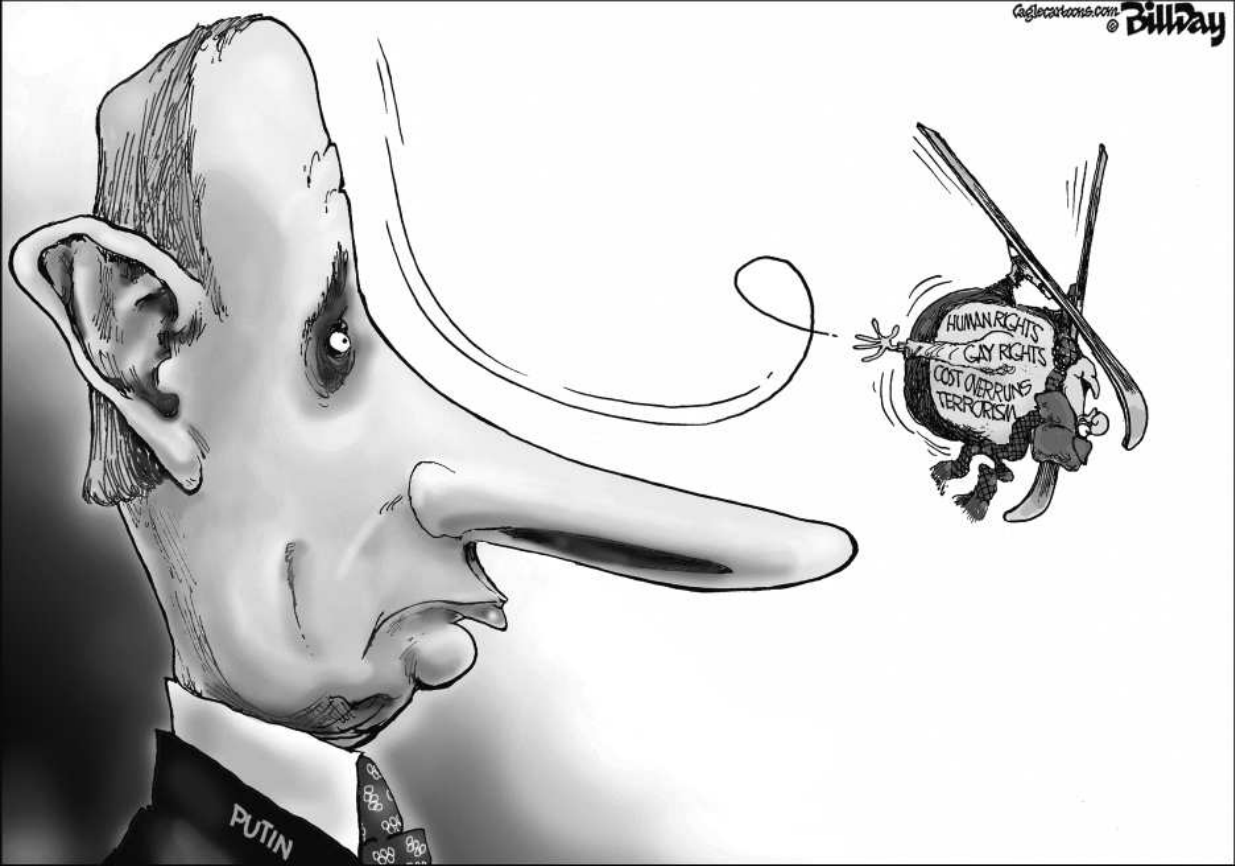
Among the most important recommendation from Jensen is to never leave space heaters running when no one is home or everyone is sleeping.

At Tuesday’s meeting, Jensen urged people to contact him if they have questions about their safety or to have him take a safety check of their residence while using electric space heaters or other sources of heat.

Jensen also passed out a flier that provides home heating safety tips involving portable and space heaters, liquid-filled and gas-burning heaters, wood stoves and fireplaces and wood burning stoves. This is information we should all have.

And just as important as his safety tips is the idea that as a community, we ought to be checking on our family, friends and neighbors. Are they cutting out food to pay for heat? Are they suffering because they are keeping their thermostat to low to keep costs down? Do they need help? Can we offer a hand?

As we welcome a forecast for warmer temperatures, it’s clear that the problem won’t be quickly resolved. It may be lessened, but as a community we must come together to make sure we all come out of this struggle together.



GUEST COLUMN

Sochi hotel stories? Try living there

We thought the big controversies in the Sochi Winter Olympics would be toothpaste terrorism or government-sanctioned homophobia. Then the press tried to check into their hotels and discovered a comical array of foibles that will do nothing to boost the Russian tourism industry. But what shocks the traveling press corps — lost hotel reservations, uncovered manholes, unsafe tap water — is nothing new to those of us who have lived in Russia.

As my friend, the Athens-based writer Robin Whetstone, put it, “Russia is the opposite of a public service announcement.” It is a country where one is mocked, as I was, by a nurse for crying out in pain after coming out of anesthesia before the doctor was done resetting my broken leg. If you want sympathy from a Russian, you’ll have to do better than a mixed-up hotel room.

I ended up in Russia because I wanted to be a spy, but the Cold War ended before I finished my degree in Russian at Lewis & Clark College. So I did my last semester at a former women’s college called the Moscow State Pedagogical University and stayed on for another year or so in various odd jobs in journalism in 1992 and 1993, that is, the swingin’ Yeltsin era.

Because I spoke Russian, my editor and his buddy dragged me along on a train trip to Nizhny Novgorod, the city formerly known as Gorky. During the Soviet era, Gorky was closed to foreigners, making it a perfect place to exile dissident nuclear scientist Andrei Sakharov.

Nizhny Novgorod was very much an open city when our train pulled in late that winter night. Getting a cab was no problem, but finding a hotel room was. Finally, our driver found a floating hotel on the frigid Oka River. But there was just one small problem, our driver told us after he inquired about vacancies. They had rooms for us, he said, but first they had to get the bodies out of the lobby.

This we had to see. So we stepped ever so carefully off the icy sidewalk onto the icy, narrow, rickety wooden gangplank into the lobby where we saw two men, soaked to the bone, lying on the carpeted floor. One was dead. The other lay there in his freezing wet clothes thrashing about and moaning. You didn’t need to be a doctor to diagnose hypothermia. Then the paramedics showed up, which is when things got really weird.

More than 20 years later, it still surprises me that the paramedics did not cut off the moaning man’s freezing clothing and try to save his life right there in the hotel lobby.

Instead, they put the dead man on their stretcher and asked my editor and I to help carry it to the ambulance. Only once the corpse was safe and secure did they attend to the man who was not yet dead. I would like to report that I had words of comfort for him, but I was too busy trying to keep my footing on the gangplank while holding the stretcher with one hand and the wobbly handrail with the other.

Other than that, it was a really nice hotel. We had a great time in Nizhny Novgorod. I only got a gun pulled on me once, but I did kind of deserve it. Maybe I had lived in Russia for too long by then, but it never occurred me to complain about the hotel. To me, it was an adventure.

So far, the worst thing anyone has reported seeing on the floor of a Sochi hotel lobby was the lack of a floor. The reporters whining about tap water should consider themselves lucky. If you go to a remote city in Russia in the winter expecting world-class hospitality, then you only have yourself to blame. You don’t go to Russia expecting everything to go right. You go to Russia because you’re going to end up with a great story.

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