

OPINION

OUR VIEW

No action on win-win

We're a little disappointed, and perhaps confused, about the inaction of the International Falls City Council to do something it appeared all members supported.

And it seems like the sticking point was not the cost of something, or the inability to agree on details, but instead distrust of one another.

At issue is a state program that certifies commercial and industrial sites as shovel ready. Once certified, the sites are included in marketing efforts by the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development to prospective buyers and developers. Last month, the city's Economic Development Authority Commission agreed to explore the certification.

Sounds like a winning situation, and it appears that city officials agree on just that. Despite a council motion Monday to proceed with the state certification for the multimodal district, no action was taken.

Instead, the council, it appears, distrusted Mayor Bob Anderson's motives when he said he was prepared to lead the effort toward shovel-ready certification. Councilor Gail Rognerud first said she supported Anderson's initiative, but later questioned whether the council's actions would usurp EDA authority. Instead, she withdrew her motion and asked for the action to be delayed until after the EDA Advisory Board had a chance to weigh in.

Clearly, Anderson has some concerns about city's economic

and community development director position created one year ago. He made reference to that fact when he asked Monday who would have led the effort one year ago. And he's made other statements that lead us to the conclusion that he does not support the position.

And while we questioned at the time the process used to hire former Mayor Shawn Mason, we said there is room for an economic development position devoted to the city, instead of balancing and justifying the needs and expenditures for economic development throughout our large and diverse Koochiching County.

Certainly, Mason should be involved in city efforts to diversify the local economy and retain existing and create new employment opportunities. But we did not hear from Anderson that she would not be involved. He told the council he was prepared to lead the effort toward certification. That does not seem out of line for a mayor.

Meanwhile, it's time for this council to lay its cards on the table and have a frank discussion about Mason's role in the city's activities, as well as the role of the EDA Commission.

We believe each and every member of this council and its support staff have only the best intentions for this community. Disagreement is healthy, but distrust is another issue. The air ought to be cleared about where our elected officials stand on these issues to move forward in a positive and healthy manner.

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GUEST COLUMN

Why use local government?

When everything becomes a priority, nothing is a priority. Behind this important leadership principle lies the heart of the problem to our national malaise. Our Washington, D.C., leaders have routinely demonstrated a lack of focus on their role in American government, rather eagerly chasing after the latest cause celebre issue, regardless of whether it is more appropriately a state matter. In the military community, we'd say they have been unable to stay in their lane.

What's the result of this lack of disciplined focus? First, we've witnessed areas we'd expect national leadership and oversight such as national defense/security and border security. ne just needs to reflect on Benghazi, NSA, the AP scandal and immigration. Even further, the deplorable level of services my fellow vets (another federal responsibility) receive upon return home is a disgrace. Reports have shown unacceptably long waiting lists for veteran's affairs, particularly for mental health services.

Second, when Washington lacks disciplined focus in their lane, the federal government grows to epic proportions with accompanying arrogance. Reflect here on the IRS scandals. Consider their obscene Las Vegas junket scandal, on one hand, or their political targeting of certain groups on the other hand –



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even encouraged through letters by a few U.S. senators. Here, it should be noted this is not an indictment on any one administration or political party, for the reality is that the federal government is just too big to be realistically managed by any administration.

Finally, Washington's usurpation of many traditional state government roles, such as welfare, has led to ineffective use of taxpayer dollars and a terrible blow upon many human spirits. The war on poverty has been an abysmal failure. Even non-profits dealing in this area, acknowledge witnessing a new third generation of citizens dependent on the government rather than themselves. Entitlement programs are bursting.

What's the answer? One thing seems certain. The solution is not to send more politicians to Washington, D.C., who feel through cleverness, the federal bureaucratic beast

can be managed through building 'a better mousetrap'.

As a locally elected county commissioner, I've been advocating devolution of power from Washington, D.C., to the local level, close to the people. One reason, it makes no sense to attempt solving largely local issues through a one-size-fits-all dictated solution from distance Washington, D.C. Remember, in Washington, D.C., 535 senators and congressmen, largely from other states, (actually 98 percent from other states) make decisions affecting Minnesotans. What a tremendous inefficiency to have Minnesotans' hard-earned dollars taken from Washington, D.C., and redistributed after their cut. Why not keep our dollars for our problems? You can bet we'd watch these dollars with more vigilance.

Finally, why devolve to local elected officials? It's not because we are necessarily any smarter or better people than those serving in Washington. Rather, it's because we're closer to the font of wisdom: the American citizen. Under this watchful eye, if we make a 'bonehead decision' we're often booted from office, unlike Washington where the re-election rate is routinely 95 percent.

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