



# Cromwell-Wright School Board (elect 3)



**Bruce Schoenberg**

**What are your reasons for running for Cromwell-Wright School Board?**

I was encouraged to run by people whose opinions I respect. I am a parent who has children enrolled in the Cromwell-Wright school, one recently graduated and one who is now in 10th grade. I have not done this before. I think I can add some fresh perspectives. I feel it is important to step up and participate in the community. The obvious primary pur-

pose of the school is as a learning center for the children in the community but I believe it is also serves as an important energy center for the entire community. I want to see it flourish.

**What are the biggest challenges facing the Cromwell-Wright Schools at this time and how will you address them?**

Maintaining fiscal responsibility and strengthening the educational offerings. I would address these issues by carefully considering the options available, soliciting input from teachers and administrative staff, and casting my votes for what seem to be the best solutions.

**How should the school balance student safety with the need for a quality educational experience in the face of situations like the COVID-19 Pandemic?**

Within the parameters set by the state following science-based guidelines, do whatever is possible to safely keep the students in the school for in person learning. Encourage teachers to offer their suggestions for ways to keep students engaged safely interacting person to person. Keeping them isolated at home for distance learning may work ok for some individuals but I think that day to day personal interactions are an essential part of the learning process. Stay prepared to return to full distance learning if necessary, to comply with state guidelines. Keep working on fine tuning the distance learning practices. Continue to provide distance learning for students that need it. Explore ways to support families dealing with the challenges of distance learning.



**Brian Granholm (Incumbent)**

**What are your reasons for running for Cromwell-Wright School Board?**

I am in my 5th year on the C/W school board. I would like to continue to help keep Cromwell/Wright a thriving school district, a place where a student

can get a high quality education and a place they enjoy to learn at. To also be part of the decision making process, to continue to see Cromwell/Wright grow into the future. The school is the cornerstone of these two small communities.

**What are the biggest challenges facing the Cromwell-Wright Schools at this time and how will you address them?**

Right Now - Covid 19 - We are trying to keep up with the ever changing guidelines for Covid 19. The Administration, Teachers and Staff have worked tirelessly to make sure Cromwell /Wright was able to have students in the building this fall

with the Hybrid model. Student enrollment, which is always a challenge for any school district.

Try to maintain a positive fund balance in these unprecedented times.

**How should the school balance student safety with the need for a quality educational experience in the face of situations like the COVID-19 Pandemic?**

Strive to keep the students safe, which is hard with the ever changing Covid. Cromwell/Wright will teach under the Hybrid model for now. Continue to follow Minnesota Department of Health and Minnesota Department of Education guidelines



**Timothy Homstad (Incumbent)**

**What are your reasons for running for Cromwell-Wright School Board?**

I was raised in Cromwell and attended school there until my graduation in 1977. I feel when we are in a position to give back in some way to a community, we should take the opportunity to do so. I have seen the changes and some of the challenges that our district has faced and have had the privilege of being a part of some of those processes and resolutions I feel that these next few years will be critical to our district's well being and I want to lend my abilities and insight to that process.

**What are the biggest challenges facing**

**the Cromwell-Wright Schools at this time and how will you address them?**

One of the greatest challenges facing most districts, and ours is no exception, is a lack of communication or misinformation leading to misunderstandings. The court of public opinion is quick to make assumptions or pass judgement without having all the pertinent information. I would strive to see that messaging is clear and concise and information is available through proper channels.

Secondly, keeping current with teaching trends and modalities. The three 'R's' when I was in school have been expanded to include emotional, mental, and at times nutritional and physical support. As a district we have risen to meet those challenges through the care and concern of our teachers, counselors, superintendent and administrative staff. My role going forward, would be to find ways to support the supporters and use those resources available to help meet needs both current and future.

**How should the school balance student safety with the need for a quality educational experience in the face of situations like the COVID-19 Pandemic?**

Even in the midst of a pandemic, education must continue to secure the future of this nation. I believe our district has taken steps necessary to provide a quality and safe educational experience for the 20/21 school year. Excellent education delivery, appropriate to each age group, and providing a safe space for students has been paramount for our district even before COVID-19 hit the scene. My role in this process is to be a sounding board at times and set a good example by adhering to statewide and local mandates for the health and safety of all involved. Taking our current situation as a challenge and not as a death sentence, allows our teachers to take this and turn it into a lesson learned. It challenges us all to be nimble and seek ways to navigate each day as it comes to us.

No photo provided

No photo provided

**Tristain Johnson**

*Tristain Johnson did not submit responses to the Moose Lake Star-Gazette questionnaire.*

# Moose Lake School Board (elect 3)



**Lisa Anderson-Reed (Incumbent)**

**What are your reasons for running for Moose Lake School Board?**

I have served on the Moose Lake School Board for the past 20 years. I am very invested and dedicated to the Moose Lake Community School. There are three generations of Moose Lake graduates in my family including my dad [Lyle Anderson],

my daughter [Danika Reed-Probst], and myself. I want to continue to promote a quality educational system in Moose Lake. The wealth of information/training that I have acquired during the past 20 years is invaluable and has provided expertise that makes me an asset to the Moose Lake School Board. I will continue to focus on advocating for a supportive learning environment and sound educational practices.

**What are the biggest challenges facing Moose Lake Community Schools at this time, and, how will you address them?**

The biggest challenge facing Moose Lake Community School at this time is the reopening of the 2020-21 school year during COVID-19. There have been many challenges and difficult

decisions made to ensure the safety of our students and staff. Moose Lake Community School staff has spent many hours in the development of the Restart Plan. My decisions will be guided by the knowledge of the experts at the local, county, state, and national level.

And, the budget is always an issue at the forefront of school administrators. The current Moose Lake School Board works closely to balance student needs and budget issues to assure a quality education for all students.

**How should the school balance student safety with the need for a quality educational experience in the face of situations like the COVID-19 pandemic?**

A safe environment is the focus of reopening for face-to-face instruction.

Moose Lake School is guided by Minnesota's Safe Learning Plan. This plan is based on the appropriate response to the level of virus in the community and is also based on science. This plan determines the extent that teachers can safely teach face-to-face or must transition to distance learning. Moose Lake School is partnering with local county public health officials and the Minnesota Department of Health. The Moose Lake Community School Reopening Plan was developed based on four guiding principles which balance student safety with the need for a quality educational experience:

1. Ensure the safety and well-being of all students and employees
2. Promote equity and accessibility to learn-

- ing for all students
3. Provide instructional delivery systems to meet the needs of all students
4. Foster positive relationships and interactions and to support each other during this difficult time

It is also important to include community input in the decision making process.

\*mask wearing required and hand washing/spatial distancing promoted

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# Moose Lake School Board (elect 3), continued from page 6



**Jerry Pederson**  
**(Incumbent)**

**What are your reasons for running for Moose Lake School Board?**

I want our school to be the best in this region. I want our students to improve in math and reading proficiency.

**What are the biggest challenges facing Moose Lake Community Schools at this time, and, how will you address them?**

A. COVID-19- follow all guidelines of the CDC, Minnesota Department of Health- do testing of employees and students.

B. Budget & state mandates- work with state to provide funding and not leaving it up to local

tax payers with the bill. I don't want to see our taxes go up.

**How should the school balance student safety with the need for a quality educational experience in the face of situations like the COVID-19 pandemic?**

The safety of students and employees comes first- then we can work at having a quality education- we need to define first what a "quality" education is- there are probably many opinions.



**Ben Anderson**  
**(Incumbent)**

**What are your reasons for running for Moose Lake School Board?**

I have been on the school board for about one year. I also have two children in elementary school. I believe I have made a difference in decision making and will continue to apply my experience to make things even better for students,

staff, and the community going forward. I don't make decisions based on my own kids, but for what I believe is best for Moose Lake School and the entire community.

**What are the biggest challenges facing Moose Lake Community Schools at this time, and, how will you address them?**

The biggest challenges in my opinion are budgets. Budgets deal not only with money in and out, but with how it gets spent. We shouldn't spend more than we take in and we need to be creative with ideas to make the school more efficient. Making decisions on spending shouldn't happen only in deficit times. It should happen continuously. Times like the current Pandemic create continuously changing decisions that directly

affect budgets. We need to be financially sound while producing the best education possible for students.

**How should the school balance student safety with the need for a quality educational experience in the face of situations like the COVID-19 pandemic?**

Safety of students and staff is done by following guidelines set by the State of Minnesota. They are the experts in this area, especially with the current Pandemic. I don't claim to know more than they do and believe their guidelines are what we base our decisions on. The education methods need to be able to change and alter with a changing world. Quality needs to be high, but the process fluid.

## Willow River School Board



**Jennifer Burlak**

**What are your reasons for running for Willow River School Board?**

I am running for Willow River School Board to be involved with the decisions that affect our students, staff, and community. I am a Willow River High School graduate, a community member and a parent to children who will be attending Willow River Schools for many years. I understand the responsibility of being a school board member and I bring a fresh perspective, integrity, and a willingness to work as a team with the rest of the school board.

**What are the biggest challenges facing Willow River Schools at**

**this time, and how will you address them?**

Many of the current challenges for the school involve the ongoing COVID pandemic. The school must be prepared to make changes quickly and have multiple plans in place to ensure education is continued whether the learning model is in-person, hybrid, or fully virtual. There is also the challenge of keeping up with sanitary measures for the health and safety of our students and staff, which include added expenses for those measures. Teachers and staff at the school are working harder than ever to provide both virtual and in-person lessons and support to students, while keeping students health a priority. The staff must receive continued support from the school as well as access to all resources needed. If elected, I understand the commitment and will attend meetings, give input, and make decisions that are best for our students and staff.

**How should the school balance student safety with the need for a quality educational experience in**

**the face of situations like the COVID-19 pandemic?**

The school currently has many safety and sanitary precautions in place this year to protect the health of our students and the staff. By maintaining these precautions while also providing a distance learning option for students not attending in-person, the school is doing their part to make sure students have safe access to education in whichever way works best for their families. Having both hybrid and distance learning plans ready and available allows the school to be continually prepared to provide a quality education for our children, especially if the time comes when fully in-person classes are no longer an option. Willow River School has been working with Pine County Public Health to plan and stay up to date with COVID numbers in Pine County, and the school must also continue to maintain communication with parents about expectations and the constant changes occurring.



**Donna Kirk**

**What are your reasons for running for Moose Lake School Board?** The school system is a vital component in a community which not only educates the future but also reflects the current pulse of the community. With over twenty years of teaching experience in K12 and higher education both via face to face and online teaching, I bring a robust and diverse skill set and experiences that I desire to use to serve the Moose Lake community as a school board member.

Currently I hold a teaching license for secondary math and have taught in public, private, parochial K12 schools as well as in higher ed preparing future elementary and secondary teachers. For seven years I have directed a STEM program that is fully grant funded for high needs students to

expand their interest and provide learning opportunities in STEM outside of the classroom in conjunction with local public schools. This diverse experience both in and outside of the classroom offers insights that I hope to share with the Moose Lake School board.

**What are the biggest challenges facing Moose Lake Community Schools at this time, and, how will you address them?** One challenge that is facing schools across the nation is the declining enrollment in public schools. With various options available for students to select from, ensuring that Moose Lake school district continues to offer high quality education for each grade is an ongoing endeavor. Along with quality classroom education are issues such as transportation, athletics, and other extra-curricular interests. Each of the myriad of components that constitute the whole educational setting plays a role in educating students. Balancing needs with resources can be a challenging task. Finding partners in the community as well as leveraging potential funding from grant re-

sources is one strategy to aid in finding the needed resources for the needs of our students.

**How should the school balance student safety with the need for a quality educational experience in the face of situations like the COVID-19 pandemic?** Safety is a top priority for everyone. This year has offered unusual circumstances and resulted in choices that have caused concern across our community and beyond. While education as well as so many other factors of our lives does not feel normal, quality education can co-exist with the need for safety. The Moose Lake School District has shown incredible commitment and given much time and effort to redefining the school experience under the given restrictions. I am confident that as we continue to work through the pandemic that our students can continue with a strong educational experience. Continuing to work together while exploring options and working with community partners should be part of every academic year.

## Willow River School Board (elect 3)



**Connie Mikrot**  
**(Incumbent)**

**What are your reasons for running for Willow River School Board?**

As I wind down my fourth year on the Willow River Area School Board, my decision to re-run came down to my passion to advocate for the education of the students in our area communities. Providing our students learning opportunities to meet their needs will help set them up for success, whether that's the next grade level, or the next steps after high school. As a board member with children in the district, locally employed, and an active participant in community events, I feel I'm accessible and approachable for parents and community members and am always willing to listen to help ensure our board is looking at the complete picture before making decisions. Our current board and administrative team have a good working relationship, and I would enjoy the opportunity to continue to be part of this team and to serve the district

for another term.

**What are the biggest challenges facing Willow River Schools at this time, and how will you address them?**

One challenge in our district is special education funding. While school districts are required to provide special education services, federal and state funding for those services cover only a small portion of those costs. That means local districts must budget to cover those costs, and the amount of funds needed can change dramatically each year, depending on students' needs, and is challenging to budget appropriately to cover all costs without using money from our general fund. To address this challenge, we continue to closely monitor special education service needs, budget as best we can, and advocate to our local agencies and representatives to continue to work on special education funding needs in Minnesota.

The special education funding challenge can affect our ability to provide the Career and Technology education courses to our secondary students that they seek to help prepare them for college or a job upon graduating. Due to our district size, some classes may have small participant levels, or difficulty funding another teaching position. To ensure we're setting all

students up for success, we continue to look at grant opportunities and creative collaboration with other districts so we can continue to provide these courses to our students.

**How should the school balance student safety with the need for a quality educational experience in the face of situations like the COVID-19 pandemic?**

Just as individual learning needs are different for each student, so are their health and safety concerns and comfort levels. In a public school district setting, we need to look at what educational experience we can safely provide for the majority of the students and staff during a pandemic situation, understand the risks, address them with sound procedures, and monitor and adjust as we move forward. I understand not everyone is comfortable with in-person learning for various reasons, and I feel our district has done a great job incorporating the online learning option this fall for those seeking that alternative to obtaining their education. I appreciate the amount of time, planning, and heart our district spent working on a plan to ensure our students and staff have a safe learning environment during this pandemic.

# Willow River School Board (elect 3), continued from page 7



**Aziz Al-fraj**  
**(Incumbent)**

**What are your reasons for running for Willow River School Board?**

As a current School Board member, I got involved with the school board 4 years ago because as a parent of two school-aged children and a son of a teacher, I wanted to directly be involved in shaping my sons' educational experience and to be a voice for other students and parents. Two of my greatest strengths are the ability to actively listen and think critically, and I will continue to

listen to teachers, parents, and students to allow them to have an active role in the students' education.

I believe that education should be as unique as the individual learner. As one who struggled with learning disabilities in school, I recognize and place value on the support and tools provided by teachers to have the confidence to achieve. I will keep creating space and community in our school to promote a quality learning environment for all. I believe all students have the ability to be successful learners. I will continue to support the administration at Willow River to push themselves to think outside of the box for our students and will help to shape an atmosphere in our community to voice their fresh perspectives and ideas as we tackle the issues we face as a community and school.

**What are the biggest challenges facing Willow River Schools at this time, and how will you address them?**

One of the greatest challenges we are facing as a district is low enrollment. A goal in our strategic plan is to maintain long term enrollment stability. We need to increase enrollment by 1-2% each year over the next five years by recruiting new students and retaining our current vibrant student population. As a school board we need to bring more opportunities to incentivize new students to enroll and keep our current students. I was actively involved in the conversation on how we can collectively come together to solve these problems. One of the programs that the administration brought to Willow River, and I am a big proponent of, is the 'Top 20 program' which supports the importance of placing value on emotional wellness which builds healthy student behavior where students not only survive, but thrive. We also need to offer more career and technical education courses, increase more college classes at Willow River, and continue to maintain and nurture our

current program for 4 year olds.

**How should the school balance student safety with the need for a quality educational experience in the face of situations like the COVID-19 pandemic?**

We are navigating very uncharted territory with the covid pandemic. Even as we face so much uncertainty this school year; as a board member, I am not losing sight of our mission to continue to build a safe, healthy, nurturing and productive learning environment for all. The administration, parents, community members and students have put a solid plan together for any of the potential scenarios we face. We will continue to listen to the state and make the best decisions for our students, teachers and staff. We are a resilient community and we will get through this together. I look forward to serving you for another 4 years at Willow River schools.

No photo provided

**Sonja Roach**  
**(Incumbent)**

*Sonja Roach did not submit responses to the Moose Lake Star-Gazette questionnaire.*

# Wrenshall School Board (elect 3)



**Nicole Krisak**

**What are your reasons for running for Wrenshall School Board?**

It is time. This community and school has given so much to me and my family it is time for me to give something back

**What are the biggest challenges facing Wrenshall Schools at this time, and how will**

**you address them?**

My goal here is to serve as an advocate for the school and the community. As the divide between them has grown over the years, I would like to bridge this gap. To start this I would like to open lines of communication between the community leaders and school leaders. From here have a continuous body of students, school leaders and community leaders to maintain relationships. Having more parent involvement with students in the community will help to repair the school-community relationship and developing community involvement inatives leading with students, this will be the key building block for creating a flourishing relationship.

**How should the school balance student safety with the need for a quality educational experience in the face of situations like the COVID-19 pandemic?**

With these uncertain times I was very impressed with the way Wrenshall is handling the situation. I was hesitate at first leaning towards distance learning but after reading the blueprint for the hybrid plan and talking with our superintendent I felt confident in sending my child to school. The lines of communication between teacher, student and parent have been very good. We are all in his together and they are doing a great job!



**Karola Dalen**

**What are your reasons for running for Wrenshall School Board?**

I would like to serve my local community and the school my children attend. It is a big responsibility, but I am willing to put the time and effort into being a proactive member of the school board.

**What are the biggest challenges facing Wrenshall Schools at this time, and how will you address them?**

All schools are challenged right now with

new Covid 19 protocols, of which the technology requirements may be very challenging. As a school board member I would want to know that staff and teachers are getting the technology support they need as well as students. There is a broad spectrum of computer and technology literacy and schools are having to learn how to support everyone.

Finances and budgeting is a continuing challenge for all schools. I have worked in the public sector my whole professional life and I believe I have a good understanding of utilizing public funds effectively and responsibly. I plan to be an asset as a school board member when tasked with difficult financial and budget decisions.

Regarding the consolidation with the Carlton school district, I would like the legislation to pass to allow debt equalization aid to be accessed by districts

who want to consolidate. Then hold a consolidation and referendum vote, which based on the public survey results from February would pass. Then get to work with official consolidation of Wrenshall and Carlton school districts.

**How should the school balance student safety with the need for a quality educational experience in the face of situations like the COVID-19 pandemic?**

During a pandemic the health and safety of students and school staff has to be a first priority. I believe Wrenshall school is working very hard to transition and maintain their level of quality education to students. There will be unexpected problems and challenges so being clear that progress is being made to resolve them will be important. All schools should be prepared to go to 100% distance learning if needed.



**Misty Bergman**

**What are your reasons for running for Wrenshall School Board?**

Love, Serve, Grow. I have grown up with this philosophy and you can only make an impact if you are willing to put in the service. I am a mom of two and step mom to an 8th grader at Wrenshall and have served previously in another MN school district for five years. I have experience and the love of chil-

dren and how important school is to them.

**What are the biggest challenges facing Wrenshall Schools at this time, and how will you address them?**

Schools in general seem to have never ending challenges and with everything changing so rapidly our aging schools and just the "usual way" of doing things needs constant improvements or updating. Facility needs and improvements are foremost along with the upcoming consolidation that will assist with educational inadequacies and staffing needs.

**How should the school balance student safety with the need for a quality educational experience in the face of situations like the COVID-19 pandemic?**

This is a situation that I am quite sure no one was prepared for and did not

foresee the timeframe that this would be a part of our lives. Schools are a very important part of a child's life and we need to focus on their mental and social well-being along with their academic growth. It is important that we remember to provide that safe environment of structure and stimulation and not have them fear a place that they love. Online learning is a great back up but the interaction with others and face to face learning is best and we need to take precautions to make sure that we can open fully to let the kid's be kids'.

No photo provided

**Alice Kloepfer**

*Alice Kloepfer did not submit responses to the Moose Lake Star-Gazette questionnaire.*

# Moose Lake City Council (elect 2)



**Greg Sarvela**  
(Incumbent)

**What is your current occupation?**  
Before retirement I was a master electrician after graduating from

Moose Lake and a tour of Vietnam.

**Please list three of the most recent or significant roles in civic involvement.**  
I am a council member at the moment and have a position on the City Park board and the City Liquor board. In the past I was a City Power and Light Commissioner.

**What are your top three priorities for the City of Moose Lake?**  
Infrastructure, property taxes and development of businesses.

**How can the city**

**provide adequate services while being mindful of property tax impact?**  
Development to add to the tax base. Moose Lake has approximately 78% of the land in the city not taxable. That leaves approximately 22% of the city to pay all the taxes for the city upkeep.

**What can the City Council do to help Moose Lake prosper?**  
Find money as far as grants and up the tax base so individual taxes do not increase.



**Kristin Heaton Huso**  
(Incumbent)

I currently work at the Department of Human Services-Minnesota Sex Offender Program as an Executive Assistant to the Facility Director. I am a Moose Lake High School graduate. My term on the council started January 1, 2001. I ran for the council at that time as a small business owner. I wanted to make a difference; revitalizing the downtown area as well as promoting Moose Lake as a destination area.

**What are your top three priorities for the City of Moose Lake?**  
My top three priorities for the City of Moose Lake would be property taxes, which are always a concern, streets and infrastructure, and keeping the businesses we have thriving.

**How can the city provide adequate services while being mindful of property tax im-**

**pact?** Taxes are always a concern. Moose Lake is 71.15% tax exempt, leaving 28.85% of the citizen paying taxes. This is a unique situation. We have been able to keep Moose Lake's property tax levy at 0% for the last two years. It is impressive what the city has been able to do with a 0% tax increase. We have been successful in receiving grant monies as well as other funding that has been applied for and received for projects we are currently working on or planning for in the near future. We must continue to creatively seek out ways help fund these projects without laying the sole cost to the tax payers of Moose Lake.

Roads and infrastructure. Deteriorating roads and infrastructure continues to be a problem. Our sale's tax monies are designated for roads. As that fund grows we will start repairing roads in order of condition. The sale's tax was designed as Moose Lake is unique in the way that we have hundreds of people coming into town each day to work at the large State and medical facility and leave each night. As well as during the summer months, the town explodes with tourists using the same roads. We have been able to capture monies through

the sale's taxes to help pay for road improvements as everyone uses the roads.

Moose Lake was able to secure four different grants for a Highway 73 Trail Extension that will provide a safe, dedicated place for our children, citizens, and visitors to walk, bike, or rollerblade. Because we were able to secure these different sources of funding, the trail extension will not affect the property tax levy.

**What can the City Council do to help Moose Lake prosper?**  
As in the past, I will continue to do my best to represent the citizens of Moose Lake. I will continuing my work to create a thriving community in Moose Lake and I will work hard to keep taxes down for our residents to the best of my ability. We, as a council, will continue to work to make Moose Lake a "destination area" by maintaining and enhancing the services that we provide.



**James Michalski**

Hello, I am James (Jim) Michalski and I am running for Moose Lake City Council. I currently work for the State of Minnesota at the Department of Corrections in Moose Lake. I have been a member of the Moose Lake Area

Fire District for almost 30 years. Currently, I am holding the position of Fire Chief. Previously, I was on the Moose Lake City Council for 6 years, at which time Moose Lake saw its two worst floods. I also was a volunteer youth coach for many of my children's athletic teams.

**What are your top three priorities for the City of Moose Lake?**  
1) Moose Lake needs to find a solution for the lack of single family housing. 2) Updating and maintaining the city streets. and 3) The City of Moose Lake needs to find a way to bring in more businesses to help out the tax base.

**How can the city provide adequate services while being mindful of property tax impact?**  
Each Department that the City of Moose Lake has needs to do an analysis/study to see if any savings can be done in their department.

**What can the City Council do to help Moose Lake prosper?**  
The City needs to allow the growth of businesses and housing to improve the tax base. Furthermore, the City Council needs to help to decide what kind of community (tourist or bedroom) Moose Lake will be with the input of city residents.

# Carlton County Commissioner District 1 (elect 1)



**Dick Brenner**  
(Incumbent)

**What are your top three priorities for the**

**county?**  
Top three priorities,  
1. Reduce the 2021 Levy which would reduce the taxes we all pay in the county.  
2. The jail project is my second priority.  
We currently are under an order from the department of corrections to build a new jail to bring our facilities up to current standards. We are currently working with the legislature to be able to run a referendum so the voters can decide how to fund the project, either by bonding or

With a 1/2 cent sales tax. We also have \$2 million in the bonding bill if it passes to help with the planning costs.  
3. To expand Broad Ban across the county. We had a presentation on how we could accomplish this. Funding is now the big question. We will apply to the state for dollars set aside for that purpose. Cares dollars we received to offset pandemic costs could possibly be used.

**How can the county provide adequate services while being**

**mindful of property tax impact?**  
As you are aware the majority of the services the county provide are state or federal mandates. we will continue to provide these services utilizing technology advances that help us work more efficiently which will lower our costs. We constantly look for ways to increase revenues through applying for grants or other sources of funds that become available.

**What can the Board of Commissioners do**

**to help Carlton County prosper?**  
The best way for the county to prosper is to keep the tax burden at the lowest rate possible. The economic department and board have \$4 million that can be loaned to expanding current businesses, and to help new businesses. For new businesses, the County has an extensive package to aid them in getting established.

No photo provided

Erik Blesener

Erik Blesener did not submit responses to the Moose Lake Star-Gazette questionnaire.

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# Carlton County Commissioner District 5 (elect 1)



**Alex French**

Current Occupation: Accountant at Alaspa & Murray LTD. CPAs

## What are your top three priorities for the county?

The top three priorities are enhancing internet access across the county, increasing economic development and providing the highest quality public safety possible. An internet connection is no longer luxury, it is necessity. Many areas in District 5 lack or have extremely slow internet. While increasing the number of towers to improve accessibility is a substantial expenditure, it would have a significant impact. The county has CARES Act funding available to cover these costs and I believe spending them here would provide a great benefit for a large portion of our county's population.

Economic development must be prioritized. Businesses provide employment opportunities as well as housing and entertainment options for county residents and increase the property tax base. The Department of Economic Development

plays a vital role and I encourage increasing the visibility through collaboration with other local business development entities (i.e. Chambers of Commerce, FDLTCC, financial institutions, etc). The County should facilitate and promote new business, not hinder it with disproportionate property tax increases and red tape. I spoke with the owners of an apartment complex in Moose Lake who have not raised their rents proportionately to match significant property tax increases, but they are not sure how long that can continue.

The role the Sheriff's Office plays in providing exceptional public safety cannot be overlooked or undervalued. There has never been a more challenging time to be in law enforcement. Sheriff Lake, the deputies, jailers, dispatchers and other staff have my utmost respect and support. They deserve a board that strongly supports them financially and otherwise. Further, as these men and women leave the department through retirements or job changes, it will be a difficult task to replace them with a smaller pool of applicants. There is a unique opportunity to attract quality applicants from other areas who seek to serve in a community like ours. We need to embrace the opportunity to attract, train and retain the best.

## How can the county provide adequate services while being mindful of property

## tax impact?

It starts by simply asking "why". The county needs to be diligent when it comes to budgets and arbitrary spending. A prime example of asking "why?" is from an article published recently in another local newspaper. Commissioner Thell was the lone dissenting vote on a motion to approve additional funds for the jail design project. He recognizes the need for a jail but voted against it because "he is concerned with a continuous cycle of spending and then asking for more money." I applaud and share Commissioner Thell's thought process.

## What can the Board of Commissioners do to help Carlton County prosper?

The Board of Commissioners can drive prosperity by recognizing that they are in a service role, not simply a leadership role. Commissioners must be available, transparent, selfless and accountable. I assume I share many of the same values as Commissioner Peterson, living in Carlton County instilled those. Being from a younger generation, my perspective and vision would add a unique voice to the board. That voice would be beneficial as the county and world experiences dramatic changes in 2021 and beyond as opportunities for a more prosperous Carlton County present themselves.



**Gary Peterson (Incumbent)**

In 2012, I retired after 32 years of teaching and coaching. My wife and I moved back to Carlton County where we both grew up. During my teaching career, I taught my students that citizen involvement is the foundation of our American democracy. I try to practice what I preach, and these are just a few of the community organizations that I am a member of. Moose Lake Area Historical Society, Cromwell Community Club, Beehive Community Club and the Moose Lake Area Chamber of Commerce.

I have always believed that property taxes are too high in Carlton County. We must continue to find a balance between providing excellent county services while holding the line on property taxes. Carlton County does not have a huge tax base, so we must support existing businesses and encourage new developments. We have a very well educated workforce, so we must do everything we can to

keep this young talent here. A big step in helping Carlton County to prosper is making sure we have good broadband for businesses and our citizens. We are required (by the State of MN) to deliver many mandated services, which are often under-funded or unfunded. We must work with the legislature to change this. We need to explore creative ways to control spending and be good stewards of county tax dollars.

As I travel around my district, I am keenly aware that there are many roads that need improvements. We need the State of MN to pass a transportation bill to provide more money to upgrade our county aid roads. When I became Commissioner, I was a big proponent of the half cent sales tax to fund transportation projects not covered by our state aid money. "I pushed for these sales tax dollars, which are derived in part from out-of-county visitors and tourists, to be used to improve our many county roads in western Carlton County." We still have much work to do.

I think solving the rural broadband issue is equivalent to bringing electricity to the rural areas during the 1930's. The citizens of Carlton County can not be active participants in society or the economy without being able to access the infrastructure of broadband. The starting point for effective rural

broadband programs is knowing where service is available and where it is not.

We need everyone to go to the Carlton County website and follow the directions and do a speed test. This will give us an accurate broadband map and data so we can dedicate resources to unserved areas. The pandemic has demonstrated our drastic need to improve broadband. People working from home, telemedicine, and our students need this to happen. We are collaborating with the State Legislature, the Governor, Fond Du Lac Band and the Federal Government to explore every option and alternative to help fund these projects.

The biggest challenge facing Carlton County today is our jail. Jail projects are never popular. Ben Franklin once said that "If you fail to plan you are planning to fail". With this costly investment we do not want to make mistakes. The Board hired a professional consultant, Mike Griebel, to look at a half dozen options for how the current jail might be replaced, now that it is subject to a sunset letter from the Minnesota Department of Corrections. Mr. Griebel, in conjunction with the Jail Steering Committee, will prepare a number of recommendations for the Board in the next few months which should provide a clear direction for the board.

# Pine County Commissioner District 4 (elect 1)



**John B. Mikrot, Jr. (Incumbent)**

Occupation: Currently I am a small business owner, and a farmer. I am also a current Pine County Commissioner.

Civic involvement: I am on the committee for Pine County's Chemical Health Coalition, the East-Central Regional Development Committee, and recently spoke at the rally for Willow River's C.I.P. in Moose Lake.

## What are your top

## three priorities for the county?

1) My top 3 priorities for the county are:

1. To provide the best possible services to the citizens of Pine County with the least possible financial impact.

2. To bring my knowledge and common sense to the board so that we can best serve the citizens of Pine County.

3. To equally and impartially represent all citizens of Pine County.

## How can the county provide adequate services while being mindful of property tax impact?

Getting bids for services that are provided by the county (such as road construction/repairs, insurance for county employees, etc.).

## What can the Board of Commissioners do

## to help Pine County prosper?

The Board can help Pine County prosper by always being willing to explore new avenues to bring businesses in to the county, by exploring housing options for those who need them, and by using commonsense and being fiscally physically responsible.

No photo provided

**JJ Waldhalm**

*JJ Waldhalm did not submit responses to the Moose Lake Star-Gazette questionnaire.*

# State Representative District 11 A (elect 1)



**Mike Sundin (Incumbent)**

## How do you feel the state government is

## handling the Pandemic?

The state government under the direction of Governor Walz has in many ways performed better than other states in minimizing the effects of COVID-19. Early public awareness, personal safeguards, and the difficult but effective shut-downs helped slow the spread of disease. This gave healthcare facilities the necessary time to prepare for the long-term treatment and care of exposed citizens.

Despite the state's best efforts, let's not forget the 2,000 deaths in Minnesota and remember our personal responsibility to protect ourselves and those around us.

A more comprehensive national strategy could have and may well yet limit the death toll in all states. It's not too late to learn from others on how to best deal with the spread of disease. I have family stationed in Germany where a national lock-down was imposed early. Following an ex-

tended "hard lockdown," COVID-19 was put on its heels. My son and his family are now free to travel Europe while exercising the personal precautions we all need to follow.

## What are your top priorities for the upcoming term?

With very difficult decisions awaiting Minnesota in the coming years due to the pandemic, the legislature needs to return to a focus on the basics. Uniform educational opportuni-

ties for all students and public transportation infrastructure to serve commerce in all parts of the state will remain as top priorities for me.

Racial disparities that exist in society need to be eliminated so that anyone in a workplace or interacting with a government entity will be treated fairly and with the respect due to all God's children.

Economic development for greater Minnesota will need to include increased funding for

broadband. Businesses, and just as important, schools require improved access and service to the technologies we all depend on.

Childcare in rural areas has become a challenge for working families in recent years. While young families struggle with balancing workplace and family needs, proper consistent care for children needs to prevail. With the financial constraints

# State Representative District 11 A (elect 1), continued from page 10

**MIKE SUNDIN'S ANSWERS ARE CONTINUED FROM PAGE 10**

Minnesota will be sure to experience in the foreseeable future, a childcare cooperative sponsored in part by local employers could play a part in serving workforce childcare needs.

**What do you feel are the biggest challenges facing our area and the state of Minnesota?**

Water issues of one sort or another are always a concern in our communities. Twin Lakes Township will be the beneficiary of a new water line that will service homeowners to

the west of Carlton, MN. Quality drinking water for dozens of homes will benefit local families once the bonding bill becomes a reality. Economic development will ensue, allowing business expansion in the area.

Excess water in Sturgeon Lake has become a major concern for homeowners. High water levels threaten septic systems adjacent to the lake and shoreline preservation methods are proving to be expensive for residents. I will continue to work with local units of government. A solution will be found through an additional bonding measure, the Legislative Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources, or Clean Water Funding.



Jeff Dotseth

**How do you feel the state government is handling the Pandemic?**

COVID-19 needs to be taken seriously, however, the Governor's response with restrictions have been arbitrary and inconsistent. A few examples of these inconsistencies are: It is safe to shop at big stores, but not the locally owned small stores. It is safe to march and protest against police in Minneapolis, but not have full attendance with social distancing in places of worship. Minnesota is long past "15 days to

flatten the curve" and the Governor has not communicated when there might be an end in sight. The Governor needs to work with the legislature to end his emergency powers and start safely opening businesses and schools with a regional response. Citizens should be able to choose for themselves their comfort level for attending weddings, funerals or other gatherings.

**What are your top priorities for the upcoming term?**

Bringing jobs to our district is my top priority. I support mining and replacing Line 3, both will bring good paying union jobs to our district. The best way to economic recovery is for the State Government to get out of the way and remove some of the unnecessary rules and regulations that hamper growth.

Public safety is a core function of state government; here the governor, the legislature and the judicial system

have a role. No society can function without public safety—not even temporarily. Laws arose naturally from primitive society as a means to achieve civilization. History teaches us that societies, like ours, with a strong system of enforcement and strong judiciary thrive and endure; those without a strong system do not. As we recover from the virus, it would serve all elected officials to remember this. I do. Public safety will be one of my top priorities as your elected representative in St. Paul.

**What do you feel are the biggest challenges facing our area and the state of Minnesota?**

I am a husband, father, farmer, small business owner and a lifelong Minnesota resident. I care deeply for our community and the values we share. I have enjoyed serving the people of northeast Minnesota for over 25 years. I am not a politician; I am just like the people

of our district who are tired of not having their voices heard in St. Paul. Our district is filled with good, honest, hardworking families and we need a representative who will fight for them. I will be a voice for the people of our district and bring common sense back to politics.

My long ties to our district and experience owning a business, mean that I have the problem-solving skills needed to represent you well in St. Paul.

The biggest health and economic challenge facing our area is recovering from the pandemic. I will work toward a safe re-opening of the economy.

The biggest public safety challenge facing the state of Minnesota is lawlessness and rioting in Minneapolis. I will support proper training and funding of police departments to maintain safety for citizens in Minnesota.

Visit the Moose Lake Star-Gazette website, [www.mlstargazette.com](http://www.mlstargazette.com)

# State Representative District 11 B (elect 1)



**Jack Frechette**

**How do you feel the state government is handling the Pandemic?**

It's an appealing but ultimately futile exercise to play Monday morning quarterback, especially with something as complex as a pandemic. As I see it, the State Government based their decisions on well-respected science, and I will always support using science to guide our thinking. The fact that our community has been spared the widespread death and illness that has plagued other areas does not mean the State Government was wrong — it means we are very lucky. And so rather than talking about how

difficult the summer was, I suggest we celebrate our good fortune, and work together to safely ease the burdens that still exist for our local economy.

**What are your top priorities for the upcoming term?**

As we speak, jobs in our community are being lost because of partisan stonewalling. The Willow River CIP, a program that has universal acclaim from everyone who has experience with it, is being shuttered because the obstructionist wing of the Republican Party refuses to pass a budget bill — one of the most critical responsibilities for State leaders. And while these jobs (over 100, in fact) are being lost, and the area loses a talented and caring workforce, and the tax base shrinks, and a taxpayer cost-saving program is thrown in the waste bin, those currently in leadership are unable or unwilling to boldly go to their own party and say "We've gone too far, and now families in my District are hurting." Blindly walking the Party line has delivered us to

this dangerous place, and we must remember that people, not Party, come first in our community.

**What do you feel are the biggest challenges facing our area and the state of Minnesota?**

The polarization we are seeing in our community has transcended politics and is now felt in our daily interactions. Neighbors are no longer cooperating. Certain family members are no longer invited to dinner. Businesses here in District 11B are being boycotted. Whatever happens next in Washington, the greatest challenge that our District must face is the effort to return to a sense of decency, of community, and of common purpose. For when our current president leaves office, be it next year or in four, our neighbors remain our neighbors, and we will need them. Dispelling the myths of our divisions and uniting under our common, rural Minnesota values is critical if we are ever going to advocate for ourselves as a District.



**Nathan Nelson (Incumbent)**

**How do you feel the state government is handling the Pandemic?**

During the first few weeks of the pandemic, there was awareness and support for the shutdown, people understood why it was necessary, even if they were negatively impacted. Partisanship disappeared; Covid-19 was our common enemy. Now as the months have dragged on, it has unfortunately become a very partisan issue. The threats of Covid-19 are not over, however, we should no longer be in a state of emergency, we need to be in a management phase. Yet Governor Walz continues to keep his emergency powers, not allowing the legislature to do its job. Keeping the legislature out of the pandemic management process is not good leadership. Emergency

powers were not meant to be used by a governor for months, they were meant to respond immediately to an emergency. We need the legislature to be part of the process moving forward.

**What are your top priorities for the upcoming term?**

Public safety is critical, not only as it relates to health but also to law enforcement. We can support our police, work towards justice, and hold those accountable for their violent crimes. We need to keep the conversations open and address these concerns civilly. We also need to focus on our state's budget. This pandemic has turned a sizable budget surplus into a multi-billion dollar budget deficit. We need to figure out what our state's true needs are and prioritize our spending to continue the programs we are obligated to fund. Many families have been financially devastated over the past few months, so now is not the time to raise taxes to fund state government. State government is going to need to tighten its belt much like everyone else has.

**What do you feel are the biggest challenges facing our area and the state of Minnesota?**

Locally, we need to

find ways to keep and grow jobs. Not long ago the Walz administration announced it was planning to close two area correctional facilities. These are good paying jobs for our district that would create a void in our local economy. We need to ensure the opportunities are there for our residents to find a job and remain employed. The biggest challenge for the State of Minnesota will be eliminating our projected budget deficit next session, and we're going to need to use some common sense to make this shortfall disappear. Raising taxes should not be an option. Finally, we need to get back to working with each other rather than finding reasons to be mad at one another. There is so much division in our state, ranging from politics to race to illness. More people need to be listening and talking to one another rather than talking over each other. We have more in common with each other than we might think. Whether you are a Republican, Democrat, or something else, I pledge to work with you, for you, listen to your concerns, and try to solve your problems. I ask for your support on Election Day

# Minnesota State Senator (elect 1)



Jason Rarick (Incumbent)

**How do you feel the state government is handling the COVID-19 pandemic?:** I believe that the State's handling of the COVID response has been good at times, and not so good at others. In the beginning, when not much was known, the response and message was pretty good. We all agreed that we needed to flatten the curve, and let our hospitals get prepared. Unfortunately,

due to some poor modelling, we were trying to prepare for a much more severe situation than what was to come. There has also been very confusing and contradictory information given to the public along the way. I think that what has been handled the worst though is how small businesses have been treated. Most were shut down, while large businesses were able to remain open,

with no option to show that they could be open and operate just as safely as the large stores. Now I believe we have moved passed the emergency, and all Governors should end their emergency powers, and return to working with Legislatures to make decisions

together as we move forward. Statewide plans and mandates do not work well, so we should bring in the ideas from elected officials from around the state so that we can make better plans for the entire state.

**What are your top priorities for the coming term?:** My priority for the coming session is going to be figuring out how to put together the State's budget for the next two years. We know that the shutdown has created a large deficit,

# Minnesota State Senator (elect 1), continued from page 11

**JASON RARICK'S ANSWERS ARE CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11**

, now we have to figure out how we will be able to cut the State's spending, with the least impact on the services provided to Minnesotans. I am also hoping to be able to get a bill done next year that will reform the Conservation Improvement Program for our Electric Utilities companies, like East Central Energy. It is reform that has been being worked on for three years, and we were very close to getting it done this last year. Even though there have been other issues that have been getting so much more attention, I have continued to work on this as well, and believe the support is there to finally get it done.

**What do you feel are the biggest challenges facing our district and the state of Minnesota?:** Like every other area in the country right now, the biggest issue we need to deal with is how do we get our economy going again safely. How do we get our kids back to school so that they can get the education they need and deserve. One of the issues we have talked about for years that has been really emphasized now, is our areas lack of internet service. Continuing to invest in rural broadband is going to be critical now more than ever, but we are also going to have to balance that with the other services Minnesotans expect. We also need to promote manufacturing in our area, processing facilities for our local farmers, mining on the range, and getting the pipeline built to protect our environment and bring needed infrastructure jobs to a part of the state in need of an economic boost.



Michelle Lee

**How do you feel the state government is handling the COVID-19 pandemic?:** Lives and livelihoods have been lost in this pandemic and yet I am hopeful we will continue to work together by following common sense precautions to slow the spread of COVID-19 and limit its devastating toll on our communities. Sadly there are those who have chosen to politicize this pandemic. In these uncertain times the health and welfare of our communities must be among our greatest priorities as citizens. I support our governor

and our health experts as they work with the knowns and many unknowns surrounding this baffling threat as they continue to make decisions based on science and common sense to help us protect our families, friends and neighbors. In a post pandemic world our continued reliance on one another's strengths and our shared values will be critical in rebuilding our communities. I know we are up to the task.

**What are your top priorities for the coming term?:** Our communities in Senate District 11 are more than a pit stop on a super highway to something better. We deserve better. As the next senator to represent our district I will fight for our rural communities. I believe the best economic tools available to us are an educated and a healthy workforce. Regardless of our zip codes our families deserve fully funded public schools and access to affordable and accessible healthcare. The men and women who get up

and go to work everyday to support our families also deserve a living wage and safety on the job.

My priorities also include supporting our small businesses that also support our families. Whether they are located on our main streets, on the outskirts of town or outside the city limits, small businesses are the backbone of our economy and they deserve a fair shake in the work of serving the needs of our communities. I'm not looking for a career. I had a successful career as a journalist sharing your stories and how decisions in St. Paul and Washington impact your lives. As your next senator I look forward to being your voice in St. Paul.

**What do you feel are the biggest challenges facing our district and the state of Minnesota?:** Our biggest challenge will be maintaining the public services to the standards we rely upon to thrive as communities, including public safety,

healthcare systems and our public schools. It's no secret our local, county and state governments will face difficult decisions due to deficits caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Before these decisions are made it will be up to each of us to provide input on programs and services critical to the success of our communities. It will also be essential for us to build consensus regardless of political affiliations.

The health and safety of our families must not be at the mercy of political winds. For too long the word compromise has been missing in the vocabulary of our elected officials. Whether we identify as Democrats, Republicans or Independents, we all value the benefits of our way of life in our towns and rural communities. This is our common ground. This is where we will build a better Minnesota for everyone.



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