

COVID CONFUSION

How the Walz administration
bumbled through the pandemic.

THINKING MINNESOTA

ISSUE 23
SPRING 2021
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If the draft standards are adopted,
the next generation of Minnesota
citizens will not only be uninformed
— but scandalously misinformed —
about our state's and nation's history
and democratic institutions.

EDUCRATS UNLEASHED

A cabal of progressives
wants to rewrite
how students
learn about their
American heritage.



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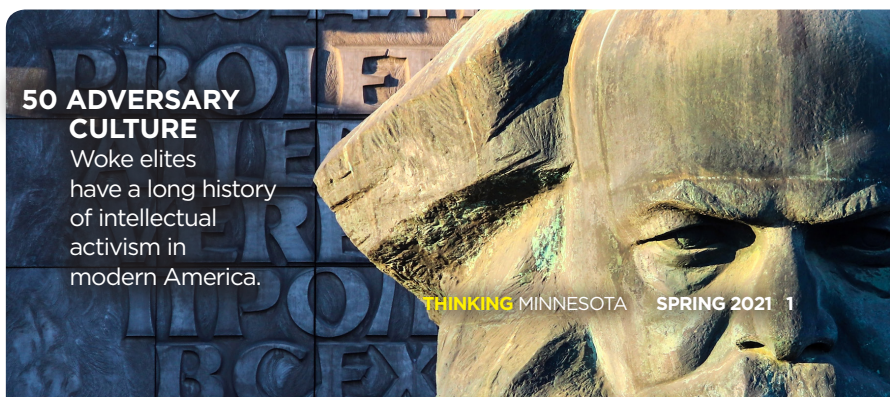
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Woke elites have a long history of intellectual activism in modern America.



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THINKING
MINNESOTA 

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Thinking Minnesota (ISSN 2573-6442) is published quarterly (January, April, July & October) by Center of the American Experiment, 8421 Wayzata Blvd., Ste. 110, Golden Valley, MN 55426, 612-338-3605. **Free subscription** available by sending name and address to info@AmericanExperiment.org. Send **address updates** to info@AmericanExperiment.org. Distributed in the United States by TNG, 1955 Lake Park Dr., Ste. 400, Smyrna, GA 30080, 770-863-9000.

Letters to the editor are encouraged and should be sent to info@AmericanExperiment.org for consideration.

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NOTE FROM THE CHAIRMAN

STOPPING 'BIG ED'

It's not too late to fight the alarming attempt to further radicalize public school curriculum.

A young couple I know is struggling to decide whether to enroll their five-year-old in a public-school kindergarten class next fall or to dig deep and pay for a private school. They fully realize that this choice is not like the one that faced their parents. Private school is no longer solely an alternative for parents who are looking for better student/teacher ratios, deeper curriculum offerings, or more rigorous academic environments. Many of today's parents are attracted to private or home schools because public education increasingly subordinates academic achievement in favor of indoctrinating students into radical political ideologies.

This is not hyperbole. Regular readers of *Thinking Minnesota* are by now familiar with the superb body of work policy fellows Katherine Kersten and Catrin Wigfall have contributed to these pages on the increasing politicization of Minnesota's public school classrooms. In this issue's cover story, the two have collaborated for "Educrats Unleashed: A cabal of progressives wants to rewrite how students learn about their American heritage."

They describe how Gov. Tim Walz's Department of Education has prepared an alarming new set of K-12 social studies standards for public school students

that will radically recast Minnesota's classroom priorities. With no legislative oversight, the members of this "Standards Committee" want to eliminate benchmarks on: the Pledge of Allegiance and the American flag; key events and figures in the American Revolution, the Civil War, World War I, World War II and the Holocaust; and references of communism and socialism. Instead, they'll teach America's history through a lens of systemic racism, LGBTQ+ communities, inclusion and exclusion of certain groups because of freedom and democ-



Ron Eibensteiner

racy, and the relationship of Manifest Destiny to whiteness, Christianity and capitalism.

"If the draft standards are adopted," Kathy and Catrin conclude, "the next generation of Minnesota citizens will not only be uninformed — but scandalously *misinformed* — about our state's and nation's history and democratic institutions. They will, however, be programmed to become the next generation of 'woke' social activists, having spent their public school years immersed in the lingo and thought world of the progressive left."

This current story, like those before it, will prompt many readers to ask what they can do to help curb this assault of radical thinking. I have some ideas about

UP FRONT

that, but I first want to describe the magnitude of the force we're up against.

"Big Education" represents all the organizations that in some way extend from the connective tissue that originates with the teachers' union and stretches to all education-related groups and most of the bureaucrats working at the Department of Education. Big Ed is the most influential political/policy powerhouse in Minnesota. By far.

Consistently cloaking everything it does behind the marketing mantra of "it's for the children," — although, strikingly, not its efforts to keep schools closed — Big Ed monopolizes every aspect of education policymaking in our state. Every year it dispatches an army of lobbyists with a seven-figure budget to quash any appearance of dissent or independent thinking among the legislators in its coalition. It spends lavishly on political campaigns and can deploy a team of grassroots activists (teachers) to virtually any campaign in the state. And it does all this with the soft acquiescence of media at every level (other than *Thinking Minnesota* or *Alpha News*). When is the last time you read anything even mildly critical of Big Ed's activities in one of our daily newspapers? Its media influence is even more complete on community newspapers that use school activities to fill its editorial pages with profiles, news and, especially, sports. Local editors aren't going to upset that relationship.

The members of Big Ed have transformed this history of unchallenged political leverage into an uncompromising sense of moral superiority and unqualified contempt for anyone who disagrees with their agenda. Kathy and Catrin have encountered a disturbing number of dissenting teachers, parents and students over the years who won't speak out publicly from fear they are risking public rebukes and reprisals. Joseph Stalin once said, "Education is a weapon whose effects depend on who holds it in his hands and at whom it is aimed." Let's just say that Uncle Joe understood the raw political power of coopting the impres-



Flashing Red Light Special

A previous "Note from the Chairman" predicted that the Minneapolis City Council's post-riot mismanagement of public safety would eventually force the exodus of the city's anchor businesses. It wouldn't happen immediately, I said, because a Fortune 500 company can't just pick up and move. But the speed with which Target became the first such corporate emigrant surprised even me. As you undoubtedly know, Target recently outlined its plan to vacate one million square feet of office space in City Center and relocate some 3,500 employees. Do we really believe the move was prompted to accommodate remote workstyles? Flex work? More like Flex flight. And I don't blame them. Downtown vendors whose livelihoods rely on daily foot traffic should take note. Target represents the first such move but won't be the last. Hopefully, the business community, particularly the Minnesota Business Partnership, will take this cue and start pressing local officials to grow up and take back our city.

sionable minds of future citizens at a very early age. Stalin-era students in the Soviet Union were taught not to think, but to absorb party ideology and history.

Members of the Standards Committee publicly exposed their arrogance when discussing the public feedback the committee received on its first draft of proposed revisions. The committee got 6,000 letters, more than 5,000 of which were facilitated by American Experiment's "RaiseOurStandardsMN.com" campaign. Despite promises of open-mindedness, the director of academic

standards at the Department of Education dismissed the letters as "white supremacy." A committee member wondered, "Should we do a select-all delete?" Go to RaiseOurStandardsMN.com to hear a full audio recording.

So, what do we do? The good news is that the process of finalizing and implementing these standards will be years long, including several useful opportunities for concerned citizens to provide input. Trust me, Big Ed wants this issue to fall off the public radar. We can't let that happen. Use this magazine to make sure your friends, neighbors and relatives know about Big Ed's political scheme. A PDF version of the story is readily available at RaiseOurStandards-MN.com. Post it on social media. Email it around. If you want hard copies of this magazine, all you have to do is ask. Talk about it in your church groups and civic organizations. Ask Kathy or Catrin to speak to your local groups. Submit letters to the editor. American Experiment is planning a series of public town meetings all across Minnesota to discuss the proposed standards. Show up! We have found that people — not just conservatives — react in outrage to the dangerous agenda Big Education in Minnesota is trying to accomplish through these standards.

The real plot point for the draft standards will evolve when a final version reaches the local districts. Big Ed may determine what they look like, but school boards will ultimately oversee *how* they are implemented. How will they integrate them into the overall local curriculum? What texts will be used? While Big Ed has manipulated off-year elections to place rubber stamp members onto local boards, they will likely be influenced by reason. And if not, why not turn it into a local election issue?

We cannot allow Big Ed to erase our American heritage from being taught in Minnesota's classrooms. Stopping them, I believe, is of greatest consequence in the endeavors of the American Experiment. Let's do it together. ★



The Golden Turkey's growing legacy

> Let me begin by saying that I am getting every liberal that I know signed up for your magazine. Your publication is fabulous!

After I cast my vote for the “Golden Turkey Award” this morning, without telling my husband which one I voted for, I asked him to tell me who he would have voted for. We chose the same wasteful project (p. 14). Might be worth the four-hour trip just to see that “outhouse.”

A suggestion might be to publish the

names of the politicians who authored these spending bills or thought up these ingenious projects. I know, that seems harsh, but reality is reality. These liberal minds need a jolt of reality, in my humble opinion.

—Arlene Markell

A vote for Walz

> I'm suggesting Gov. Tim Walz be awarded a Golden Turkey for being TOTALLY INCOMPETENT. The reasons are too numerous to mention.

—Jim Deutsch, Maple Grove

Woke wake-up call

> I am a self-described recovering “wokester” who leans left, and a father of school-aged children, and over the past couple of years have been waking up to see the harm that racial equity causes in schools.

I do not have an outlet to share this information that wouldn't unleash the mob. And I never would have imagined I would be sending your organization an email...but such is the times. The biggest concern is with the new “Due North” proposal by the governor.

I have listened to countless teachers tell me that every day is like

walking on eggshells. They change their behavior so they don't appear racist, and students pick up on this and take advantage, while other teachers virtue signal their wokeness through lessons, speeches, meetings, professional development, etc. Meanwhile, the achievement gap and outcomes have gotten worse. Not to mention we've created a generation that is more anxious and depressed. But no one wants to talk about how our education system is causing these problems. We can't even have the debate.

—Name withheld by request

Re-education

> Is the purpose of our public schools to teach our children or to “re-educate” the next generation?

They are suffering abuse at the hands of our tax-funded institutions while losing all sense of self-worth, heritage, national pride and family values!

—Dean Bredlau, Cannon Falls

Flair for the dramatic

> I always look forward to Katherine Kersten's essays as they are filled with numerous examples of false logic and bias. I feel it's useful to expose both as they appear in the article, “The Revolution in Minnesota Schools.”

Ms. Kersten lays out a historical timeline of what she describes as the “crusade for racial equity” in the “Why now?” section. She chooses the ad hominem fallacy to attack the character of Patrisse Cullors in an attempt to delegitimize Critical Race Theory and the Black Lives Matter movement. Ms. Kersten is insinuating that nothing good can come from such a person or organization.

Following her attack, Ms. Kersten employs the black-or-white fallacy in the section titled, “Not education, but indoctrination.” The very title supposes that there are only two extremes when considering educational equity. The two examples she presents as evidence, one being a former elementary teacher who

continued on page 9

“I'm suggesting Gov. Tim Walz be awarded a Golden Turkey for being

TOTALLY INCOMPETENT.

The reasons are too numerous to mention.”





MINNESOTA'S LEADING CONSERVATIVE VOICE

For 31 years, Center of the American Experiment has been Minnesota's leading voice on behalf of freedom and conservative common sense. Most often, that voice has been that of Center staff and policy fellows.

Sometimes, it has been that of honored guests and world leaders such as George Will, Benjamin Netanyahu, Margaret Thatcher, Sarah Huckabee Sanders and, in May, Laura Ingraham.

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UP FRONT

Labor

WELL-INTENTIONED DAMAGE

A \$15 minimum wage would be especially hurtful to residents in Greater Minnesota.

A proposed increase in the federal minimum wage would hurt Minnesota's economy more than it helps — hiking childcare costs by 13 percent, pushing business owners to lay off workers, and putting employment out of reach for tens of thousands of job seekers.

Despite its failure to pass the Senate, thanks to eight Democratic defectors, liberals are committed to cramming one through Congress eventually. A 48 percent jump, to \$15 an hour, would hurt Greater Minnesota the most. Salaries tend to be lower there compared to the Twin Cities, and childcare costs would surge beyond reach for thousands of Minnesotans.

On average, families would pay \$3,600 more per year to care for their kids, according to The Heritage Foundation. It's even harder to afford this when families are earning less income. The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office estimates a loss of 1.4 million workers, a 0.9 percent decrease, if \$15 becomes the federal minimum wage.

Meanwhile, poverty would fall by 900,000 people — not enough to offset the jobs that go away. That's a net loss overall. And it's low-skill and young workers who would suffer the most, with many forced out of the job market.

One of the big problems with these arbitrary wage increases is the cost of living variance. Someone in St. Cloud can survive on a lower Minnesota wage than someone in St. Paul, who can get by on less than \$15 an hour much more easily than someone in New York. In other words, a one-size-fits-all approach, although well-intended, doesn't really work.

This is also why large corporations such as Amazon are not good examples of minimum wage success. Amazon — or Target, if we want to be local — can afford a higher wage floor, thanks to bigger profit margins. But the guy with the clothing store down the street, or the one with

the mini mart around the corner, can't do the same, especially in a small town.

Let's say it's \$10 an hour for one clerk. Now Minnesota says, "At minimum, you must pay him/her and the other clerks \$10.08." Or worse, President Biden gets his way and all full-time workers must make at least \$15 an hour.

The store owner now must consider several options. He can buy cheaper goods. But that could mean losing customers and money. Same if he moves his store to a place with cheaper overhead costs. Or he could hire a bunch of part-time workers and no full-time staff, or fewer staff altogether, which means workers lose. And before you say he should take a hit to his wallet, keep in mind that the average annual income for a small business owner is less than \$70,000, according to the compensation platform PayScale.

Also understand the importance of small businesses to our economy. They accounted for 99.7 percent of all enterprises with paid employees, 47.1 percent of all workers, and (on the net) 65 percent of all new jobs created in 2020, according to the Small Business Administration.

Statewide, there is already a wage increase — a fraction of a percent, to \$10.08 hourly for big companies and to \$8.21 for small companies. And in the Twin Cities, the increase will mirror the rate Democrats want nationally. It has already started for big businesses located in the state's capital city, and small businesses must follow suit by 2025. Across the river, the target dates are 2022 for big businesses and 2024 for small ones. ★

—Martha Njolomole

**On average,
families will
pay \$3,600
more per
year for
childcare.**



Fixing Elections

Despite voting it down in 2012, Minnesotans support voter ID.



As America fights a bipolar battle over election fraud — from rioters storming the Capitol this past winter to Congressional Democrats scurrying to kill voter ID requirements this spring — Minnesotans are grappling with their own conflicting feelings on the matter.

Only 35 percent of Republicans feel confident about state elections going forward, compared to 95 percent of Democrats and 69 percent of independents, according to the latest *Thinking Minnesota* Poll. But a full 69 percent of respondents, including 73 percent of independents, want people to show a photo ID

before entering the voting booth.

It's an interesting contrast as state residents prepare for next year's midterm elections, when Gov. Tim Walz will be running for a second term and Republi-

cans nationally will be desperate to take back the U.S. House of Representatives.

Election reform, however, is unlikely at any level.

In Washington, HR 1, which would eliminate the need for voter ID nationwide, passed the House earlier this year, 220-210. But the Democrats lack a filibuster-proof majority in the Senate.

In the Minnesota Legislature, the Republican-led Senate favors voter ID laws, while the Democrats — the party of Walz and in control of the House — want to eliminate vouching restrictions, register 16 and 17-year-olds, and enhance public financing options.

This almost certainly means gridlock and the death of bills proposed by both sides, despite bipartisan support among voters for an ID law. The state almost got one, about a decade ago, but the referendum failed.

Why? There are two reasons, one big and one small.

The small one is, it was proposed as a constitutional amendment. Some Minnesotans simply didn't like the idea of changing the state Constitution. Amendments are normally reserved

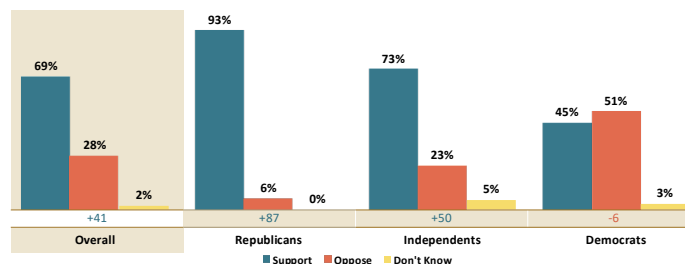
for larger issues that can't be handled with statutory changes.

The bigger reason is its tie to the marriage amendment. Voter ID fell victim to a well-funded and effective "Vote no" campaign on another issue altogether. And in the process, Republicans lost majorities in both the House and Senate. ★

—Bill Walsh

OVER TWO-THIRDS OF MINNESOTA VOTERS SUPPORT VOTER PHOTO ID.

"Do you support or oppose requiring individuals to show a form of government-issued photo identification when they attempt to vote?"



EDUCATION
THE REVOLUTION IN MINNESOTA SCHOOLS

In the name of ending white supremacy and systemic racism, school districts are indoctrinating students with a radical new vision of American society.

By Katherine Kersten



“Taking away history is how a society falls. These changes would be detrimental. Ignoring the problem is not the answer, and if this is approved my children will not be taught through the school system.”

Mail Bag, continued from page 5
felt that racial equity training “resembled indoctrination into a cult,” display her confirmation bias. It is clear that from the very beginning of this article, Ms. Kersten is looking to support her belief that what she terms “racial identity politics” is a clear and present danger to Minnesota children.

She says this is Marxism and cherry-picks a variety of historical events perpetrated from “some of the 20th century’s most loathsome dictators” such as her suggestion that racial equity will lead to the resurrection of Mao’s Red Guard — all to appeal to the emotions of her readers.

Ms. Kersten certainly has a flair for the dramatic. She might want to hire a literary agent to shop this article as a screenplay. But its logical errors and biases fail to persuade any reader not predisposed to agree with her premise.

—Tom Brandt, Blaine

Fear of the left

> I, too, am a conservative, and the liberal left and our domestic enemies scare the hell out of me. I pray that “Minnesota Nice” someday returns.

—Al Smith, Owatonna

The importance of historical accuracy

> I attended school in Wisconsin most of my life, but I was part of the Minnesota education system for a year and I am greatly concerned [about the proposed social studies standards]. Taking away history is how a society falls. These changes would be detrimental. Ignoring the problem is not the answer, and if this is approved my children will

not be taught through the school system. I will not brainwash them with lies, saying the past never happened because mistakes were made. I would rather teach my children to own up to mistakes, take responsibility, but to always remember them, so they will not be repeated again.

I am sickened by this proposal.
—Annie Lorsung

A real leader

> Absolutely great article on Kendall Qualls. When I learned he was running against Dean (This is your fault!) Phillips, I researched Mr. Qualls to find out



who he is. What I found impressed me, and I sent off a request to the campaign for a yard sign.

After reading the “What I Learned” story, I am even more impressed. I believe Mr. Qualls should run for public office again. Let me be one of the first to request a Qualls for Governor sign. ★

—Steven Roeder, Coon Rapids



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Kimberly Ells - Author of *The Invincible Family*, Ells speaks nationally, including at the Global Family Policy Forum and the United Nations. She has written for *The Federalist*, *Townhall*, *Life Site News*, and more. She will speak on the global campaign against children and our power to oppose it.



Katherine Kersten - A writer, attorney, and Senior Policy Fellow at Center of the American Experiment, Kersten writes on cultural and policy issues for many publications, including *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Weekly Standard*, *Christianity Today*, *Policy Review*, and *First Things*. Kersten will discuss the toxic ideology behind the proposed new MN social studies standards and ways for parents to fight back.



Alex Newman - An award-winning, international journalist with a global reputation for hard-hitting reporting. He is founder and president of Liberty Sentinel Media, Inc. and reports for news sites such as *The EpochTimes* and *World Net Daily* (WND). He will unmask the real world of ‘transformational education’ and provide practical options for parents.

“Liberties are the gift of God... they are not to be violated...”
- Thomas Jefferson

Date: Saturday, 24 April 2021
Time: 1:30 pm
www.childprotectionleague.com

Seating is very limited. Please visit our website for event details and to register.

Energy

Pawlenty's Flawed Prescription

The former governor's view of 'modernism' mandated an 18th-century technology to power a 21st-century economy.

Former Minnesota Gov. Tim Pawlenty published an op-ed in the *Star Tribune* ("Where does the GOP go from here?" Jan. 11) that said the Republican Party needs to embrace modernism. In many respects, I agree.

However, it would be easier to take seriously Pawlenty's lecture on the need for a modern energy policy if his signature policy achievement in this area, the Next Generation Energy Act of 2007 (NGEA), had not mandated the use of an 18th-century technology to power a 21st-century economy.

What I am about to say will likely sound like heresy to many *Star Tribune* readers, but it needs to be said: Wind and solar are uniquely bad ways of generating electricity. The sooner we all acknowledge this reality, the sooner we can rally around a truly modern energy future.

Most people don't realize that electricity is consumed the instant it is generated. Furthermore, the electric grid is not a giant bathtub that stores electricity for later use. It is a highway, not a parking lot.

This seriously limits the utility of wind turbines and solar panels, because they

can only produce useful electricity when the wind is blowing or the sun is shining. There is no practical way to store the electricity generated by them for later use.

Ignoring this reality of physics, which is a science, is a recipe for higher electricity prices and less reliable service. California has learned this lesson the hard way.

The Golden State's electricity prices increased 27 percent faster than the national average since 2008, when then-Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger signed an executive order requiring 33 percent of California's electricity to be renewable by 2020.

Subsequent governors micromanaged the electricity supply to an even greater extent, causing the entirely predictable rolling blackouts that caused two million Californians to lose power during an August 2020 heat wave.

According to California's grid operator, there was not enough electricity to meet demand during the heat wave because of a drop in wind production and the setting sun. Nightfall rendered California's solar panels incapable of providing the much-needed power.

Pawlenty's renewable energy mandate has not resulted in electricity shortages in Minnesota, but the Polar Vortex of 2019 was a close call.

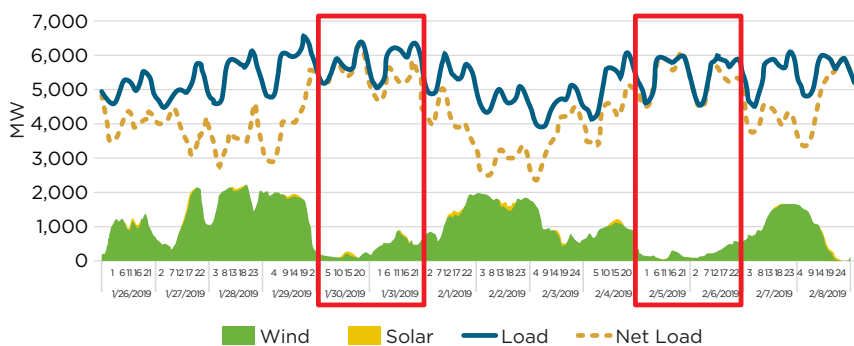
Energy demands surged as temperatures plunged to 29 below, but it was then too cold for the wind turbines that Mr. Pawlenty mandated on the grid to operate. Minnesota's coal, natural gas and nuclear fleet carried the day.

Meanwhile, thanks to the NGEA, Minnesota electricity prices have increased 23 percent faster than the national average since 2007. Minnesota families now pay an additional \$108 per year for electricity even though they use eight percent less electricity than they did in 2007.

An additional \$108 may not be much for someone serving on several corporate boards, but that was half of my family's entire Christmas budget when I was growing up.

The Winter Challenge — Historical Example

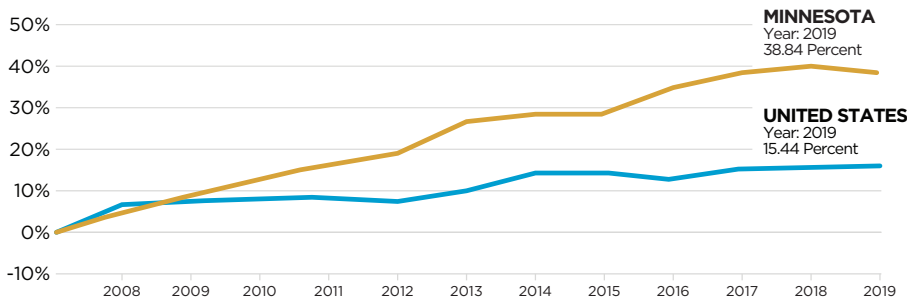
1/26/19 to 2/8/19 Renewable and Load Output (MW)



Source: Xcel Energy

Average Retail Price of Electricity, All Sectors, Annual

Indexed to 2007 as Percent



Source: U.S. Energy Information Administration

And while the NGEA has been economically punitive to Minnesotans, the results have been about average in terms of lowering emissions. Federal data from 2007 through 2019 show Minnesota reduced carbon dioxide emissions from power plants by 34 percent, while emissions nationally fell 32.3 percent.

This means Minnesota paid a massive price premium for average results.

A truly modern, forward-looking energy agenda would have legalized new nuclear power plants and embraced large hydroelectric power producers in

Thanks to Pawlenty's NGEA, Minnesota electricity prices have increased 23 percent faster than the national average since 2007. Minnesota families now pay an additional \$108 per year for electricity even though they use eight percent less electricity than they did in 2007.

Canada. The NGEA did neither, even though these energy sources produce reliable, carbon-free power around the clock, regardless of weather conditions. Even at 29 below.

Here's my original ending:

If Mr. Pawlenty wants to show conservatives how to succeed in the future, he needs to substantively engage in a discussion about the collateral damage and mediocre environmental results his renewable energy mandates have caused. Otherwise, his drive-by commentary is unwarranted and unwanted. ★

—Isaac Orr

A version of this article first appeared in the Star Tribune.



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5 QUESTIONS

WITH
RYAN
HIRAKI

The new managing editor of *Thinking Minnesota* has spent much of the past decade living and working overseas, including the last four years in Vietnam.

A former journalist, marketer and teacher, he watched from afar as America grew more divided. Now he's fighting for the freedoms he feels are slipping away.



Given that you had never even visited Vietnam before moving there, why did you jump at making such a drastic change?

A friend teaching in China mentioned that there are a lot of opportunities like his in Asia, including Vietnam. I thought I could do a lot of good, helping kids learn English and eventually study in America, where they can experience life in a free country. Despite the war, the Vietnamese tend to love Americans and would love to learn English and eventually live in the U.S., often to pursue their innate, entrepreneurial dreams. In fact, a handful of my former students are here today, studying at various colleges. They can maybe someday get jobs after graduation and stay here permanently, to make better lives for themselves and their families.

So here you are, in a country unfamiliar to you. What were your first impressions?

Traffic hits you harder than anything. It's a mosh pit of motorbikes — many of which drive on the sidewalks, on the rare occasion there is a sidewalk. With that sight comes the constant sound of engines and horns, the smell of choking exhaust that is so bad you can taste it, and the feeling of the bikes just missing you or slightly clipping you as they zoom by. That's the bad first impression. Then comes the good stuff. You'll meet friendly people who want to share the best thing their country has to offer: the food! The different flavors and textures among a wide variety of dishes make Vietnam a bucket list destination for

foodies everywhere. A couple of my favorites are banh khot (mini pancakes topped with shrimp) and cao lau (wheat noodles with roast pork).

How did you assimilate to Vietnamese culture and what were your most arduous challenges?

My assimilation was aided by the fact that I knew I wanted to be there, largely because of my fascination with the history of the country — from the Japanese trading port in Hoi An to the French

“We have to quit this cancel culture nonsense. It’s out of control. Disagreeing with someone’s politics doesn’t give you the right to try to get them fired.”

colonization of Saigon. The language barrier wasn't too bad because so many Vietnamese speak at least some English, and translation apps typically suffice. The biggest problem is communism. The government claims it's a socialist republic, but it's still a one-party system that controls all media outlets while suppressing free speech. In 2019, a new “cybersecurity law” went into effect that prohibits anyone in Vietnam from making disparaging remarks about the

government on Facebook and other social media. Violators can go to prison, depending on the severity of the posts.

How did these four years in Vietnam impact your perspective on America and its system of governance?

America's system of checks and balances truly is incomparable. We're a country of almost 350 million people yet we have enjoyed unparalleled success thanks to our Founding Fathers and the Constitution they wrote for us. That doesn't mean we're perfect. But we're good enough that millions of people from around the world seek to move to our country every year. That's because we provide the best opportunity for everyone to control their own destiny and rise economically. Don't listen to

those who say the American Dream is dead. It's just different. Those old pieces of parchment paper have proved to be pretty damn durable, and our First Amendment allows everyday Americans, including all of us at American Experiment, to do our best to defend these ideals.

What would you like other Americans to glean from your Vietnam experience?

Appreciate the Constitution. Those who hate Donald Trump never had to worry about him being in the White House more than eight years. So why destroy one of the world's greatest documents, causing long-term damage, just for short-term gains? There's no logic to that. We have to quit this cancel culture

nonsense. It's out of control. Disagreeing with someone's politics doesn't give you the right to try to get them fired. And hey, Jack Dorsey! Stop censoring established news organizations just because they dig up dirt on your favorite candidate's son! On a related note, saying something that riles people up isn't the same as yelling fire in a crowded theater. I don't recall anyone blaming Bernie Sanders and the Democrats when their fiery rhetoric about conservatives was followed by the shooting of U.S. Rep. Steve Scalise, R-La., and other innocent bystanders at a congressional softball game. I've always thought of myself as a right-of-center libertarian, but the more the left tries to hijack our cherished freedoms, the more I'm going to lean right while I try to defend them. ★

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UPFRONT

Golden Turkey

Rest in Luxury

The Goose Creek Rest Stop cost taxpayers \$7.2 million.

The inaugural Golden Turkey Award (given to Gov. Tim Walz for his \$6.9 million morgue) was such a success that the Center has decided to make it a regular feature of *Thinking Minnesota*. In February, four strong nominees kicked off the next round of the Golden Turkey award selection process. The contest gained momentum and press coverage, doubling the total votes from the first contest, to almost 5,000. The envelope please...

4th Place

Spirit Mountain Ski Hill

The City of Duluth was nominated for its ongoing financial support (and bailouts) of the Spirit Mountain ski hill. The taxpayer subsidy for the ski hill begins each year with \$1.1 million from sales tax revenues. Spirit Mountain has been losing money every year because — wait for it — fewer people are coming to ski. After a new chalet was built in 2013, the losses really piled up and led to additional bailouts of \$235,000 in 2019 and \$300,000 this January.

The *Duluth News Tribune* wrote an editorial half-heartedly defending the Spirit Mountain subsidies, calling the Golden Turkey nomination a “notorious nod.” Stay tuned to this project because a committee tasked with fixing the Mountain’s mounting financial problems just recommended spending another \$23 million! If we build it, they will come.

3rd Place

Treetop Trail at the Minnesota Zoo

It’s not bad enough that Minnesota is the only state to own and operate its own zoo. Or that for 34 years the Minne-

sota Zoo wasted money on a monorail system that cost \$8.4 million and saw ridership decline year after year because the train ran in a loop and provided little opportunity to interact with or even see the animals.

Despite such costs, Minnesotans will continue sinking money into the project, thanks to \$13 million from the legislature’s record-breaking 2020 bonding bill. The zoo is repurposing the 1.3-mile elevated track into the Treetop Trail. The

Gov. Tim Walz was the first winner, for his \$6.9 million morgue.

new walking path will have the same disadvantages as the monorail — being above the animals with little chance to see them.

It’s the zoo’s latest boondoggle and that’s why it made our Golden Turkey Award list.

Runner-up Chatfield Center for the Arts

After a very public veto of funding for the Chatfield Brass Band Music Library in 2008, this small town south of Rochester did get the last laugh from the 2020 legislature. The Chatfield Center for the Arts received \$8.7 million to improve its facility — a huge amount of money for a town with fewer than 3,000 residents.

The Arts Center funding epitomizes the wasteful spending in this record-breaking, \$1.9 billion borrowing bill. Over \$161 million in the bill went for pork projects like skating rinks, community centers, theaters, museums, zoos, even a “salt shed.” The Chatfield Center for the Arts represented all of these wasteful projects on this Golden Turkey Award list.





Winner
Goose Creek Rest Stop

The overwhelming winner of the second Golden Turkey Award goes to the rest area with curved glass, Brazilian Ipe wood, a modern play area and bathrooms fit for a fancy hotel.

The Minnesota Department of Transportation used \$7.2 million of trunk highway funding (money that could have gone to roads and bridges) to refurbish the Goose Creek Rest Stop. No one can answer why they used taxpayer money for such a fancy design, and transportation officials are vowing never to let it happen again.

The rest stop is on Highway 35, on the way to Duluth from the Twin Cities. If you make the drive, watch for the American Experiment billboards erected to celebrate this great award and let drivers know when to exit to experience this one-of-a-kind, silly, waste of your tax dollars. Do you think MnDOT will let us put up a commemorative Golden Turkey plaque in the lobby? ★

—Bill Walsh



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—John Hinderaker
President,
Center of the American Experiment

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UPFRONT

Education

Choice Over Spending

Education Savings Accounts benefit students who need the most help.

The debate over expanding access to K-12 education options ended with both the advancement of a groundbreaking bill and the disparagement of a policy expert who supports it.

S.F. 1565, passed in March by the Senate Education Finance and Policy Committee, will create Education Savings Accounts (ESAs) in Minnesota. By May, Minnesotans will know if it becomes law.

These state-funded accounts would empower parents to customize their children’s education by accessing a variety of educational services simultaneously that meet their immediate needs — from tutoring, tuition assistance and curriculum to mental health treatment, special education services or therapy and postsecondary costs.

Catrin Wigfall, a policy fellow at Center of the American Experiment, testified that the bill prioritizes students, which is the way spending should work considering money comes from families in the first place.

“Education funding isn’t meant for buildings,” she said. “Efforts to limit the education options families can access tells them, ‘We don’t trust you.’ And it disproportionately impacts the least advantaged, including communities of color.”

Her words agitated the decorum out of DFL Sen. Jason Isaacson.

“To have people [testify] from the Center of the American Experiment, which is just a joke to begin with, is ridiculous. I can’t take their propaganda seriously, ever,” Isaacson said.

What he must take seriously is the heightened sense of urgency COVID-19 has added to meeting students’ needs. Families now more than ever are realizing the shortcomings of a top-down education system, leaving many desperate for other options.

Education Savings Accounts would create an equal opportunity for all children in Minnesota to access such alternative options.

Five states (Arizona, Florida, Mississippi, North Carolina, and Tennessee) have ESA programs, with a handful of others (including Indiana, Iowa, North Dakota and Kansas) considering their own ESA legislation. Multiple states have advanced and passed ESAs with bipartisan support, and the structure of savings account programs has been found constitutional, as aid is going to parents.

Wigfall cited numerous empirical studies from around the country about the success of school choice programs like the ESA initiative being proposed and also noted that no study has found that these programs cause a negative fiscal impact on either taxpayers or public schools. ★

—Bill Walsh



Water Cooler Talk

In case you missed it...and what to watch for.

'Think about it'

That's the key phrase in a statewide radio and digital ad campaign that **Center of the American Experiment** launched in February, urging Minnesotans to **challenge Gov. TIM WALZ's policies**. Here's a sample:

Think about it.

In just 10 years, the Minnesota state budget grew from \$14 billion to \$26 billion. That's almost double! Did your income double in the last 10 years?

And now Gov. Tim Walz wants to raise taxes AGAIN so government can grow even more — instead of eliminating wasteful spending.

Think about it. It's time to stop the wasteful spending.

Shining a light on America's blackouts

Policy Fellow **ISAAC ORR** was not surprised when February's cold snap left more than four million Texans shivering in the dark for several days. And his insights ended up in *The Hill*, *National Review*, *New York Post* and *The Wall Street Journal*.

This comes after two million people in **California lost power during a heat wave** last August, all because of state government policies that mandate **more wind and solar resources**.

You can get more on **Isaac's takes** in his **Q&A with Austin-based author ROBERT BRYCE** (p. 34).

A cure worse than the disease

More than 600 people registered for a February webinar to hear **American Experiment President JOHN HIN-**



DERAKER probe **U.S. Rep. TOM EMMER, R-Minn.**, for his insider perspective of the Biden administration, which led to lots of **COVID discussion**.

Emmer, who in three terms has earned the **chairmanship of the National Republican Congressional Committee**, expressed support for medical professionals but **questioned Walz's leadership** for looking at just the viral side of the situation instead of also understanding **lockdown effects such as depression, domestic abuse, drug addiction and suicide** (p. 19).

To watch the entire webinar, go to www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Xx-OXD-7DOQ.

Education and the Rochester Chapter

Policy Fellow **CATRIN WIGFALL** shared the **shortcomings of a top-down education system** in coordination with **American Experiment's Rochester Chapter** during a winter webinar.

COVID has exacerbated disparities and has prompted parents to **explore other education options**, such as **homeschooling, charter schools and private schools**.

To see the entire webinar, go to www.crowdcast.io/e/bhsyd9vr.

Wigfall also led another webinar in February in which she shared the fact that **Mississippi's black and Hispanic students perform better in reading than their counterparts in Minnesota** despite the southern state spending less per student.

DAVE ZIFFER, whose after-school reading program **boosted scores in the Chicago suburbs**, joined **Wigfall** to highlight how parents can teach their kids to become phonetic readers.

For more, go to www.youtube.com/watch?v=l3xWvdXJ6tU.

Annual claim to fame

Fox News host **LAURA INGRAHAM** will be the keynote speaker for the Center's **2021 Annual Dinner** at **7 p.m. on Saturday, May 1**.

We're **livestreaming the event**. Go to www.AmericanExperiment.org for more details.

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TOM STEWARD

BLOATED GOVERNMENT

How DFL operatives have taken control of the ‘non-partisan’ League of Minnesota Cities.

The more bloated state and federal government gets, the clearer it becomes. Local government remains closest to the people, a place where you can still speak up and maybe even make an impact in your community.

But the pressure’s always on to make the duties of city councilors, mayors and county board members more complicated, more technical and more dependent on lawyers and consultants, more like bigger government.

Take the League of Minnesota Cities (LMC), a lobbying organization that collects hundreds of thousands of taxpayer dollars in membership and other annual fees from all but 18 of the state’s 853 cities.

LMC presents itself as a nonpartisan membership group “dedicated to promoting excellence in local government. The League serves its more than 800 member cities through advocacy, education and training, policy development, risk management, and other services.”

Yet no other organization works more relentlessly to grow local government and the cost to taxpayers. The advocacy group fields six lobbyists at the State Capitol, spending some \$770,000 of taxpayer money collected from cities in 2019 alone to achieve its objective of expanding local government. With combined assets of over \$551 million, the League of Minnesota Cities and its Insurance Trust is arguably the most well-funded, influential lobbying organization in Minnesota.

The “training sessions” the advocacy group hosts to initiate newly elected city officials every two years provide a window into LMC’s tactics and goals. Only individuals with an official city



Tom Steward

email address and LMC account can gain access to the closed sessions, which cost \$175 this year.

American Experiment found a conservative participant willing to monitor and report on what went on in the online sessions on the condition of anonymity. Our insider had previously taken the training as a rookie local elected official. Once in office, however, our informant soon became concerned over what increasingly appeared to be a gap between the LMC’s rhetoric and reality.

“My gut told me something was off,” our source said. “Why were there only DFL campaign staff at their events during the 2018 elections? Why did their event speakers seem to address only ‘progressive’ policies like public employee union pay increases, local minimum wage

ordinances, an increase in the gas tax and GreenStep Cities?”

He took the training again, hoping for real non-partisanship. But his findings at LMC’s 2021 Elected Leaders Institute training revealed the opposite.

In a discussion about leadership, speakers emphasized the goal of being “likeable.” The word “accountability” was not mentioned. Each presenter stressed the importance of depending on the LMC experts. The indoctrination of 2021’s newly elected city officials has begun. Be quiet, follow the liberal agenda, trust the LMC and everyone will like you. Don’t and you’re a bully, blamer, disengaged politician with an agenda, attributes listed in the training’s “Leadership Reputations to Avoid.”

The policy agenda in the “Maintaining Balance” session focused on racial equity, diversifying your workforce and, to be fair, economic development.

Minnesota’s Open Meeting Law (OML) was characterized as “confusing, complex, and yes, sometimes a little bit scary,” which is exactly what they’d like newly elected representatives to believe. Translation: Keep quiet, defer to the LMC and let administrative bureaucrats handle everything so you don’t get in trouble and lose your seat for a violation.

The presenter lectured participants on “how to build consensus” among council members, without violating the Open Meeting Law, and recommended they “use staff to distribute information to other members,” noting that the “OML doesn’t apply to staff.” In short, newly elected leaders are instructed to give staff oversight over their communications rather than executing their statutory role

UPFRONT

Border Battles

as elected representatives with authority over staff. That's transparency?

New members are also counseled to be wary of using social media, despite the fact the legislature in 2014 exempted social media use from OML violations as long as posts are public. Yet these warnings peppered the training sessions to make sure council members understand their authority to communicate is narrow and should not take place outside the scrutiny of the administrative bureaucracy.

The LMC underscores that public finance is "intimidating" and "complicated." But anyone with even rudimentary budgeting experience did a double take on the presenter's definition of property taxes as "filling the gap" between city revenue and expenditures! Property taxes are a city's primary source of revenue, not just something that "fills a gap."

So, why would the LMC want council members to think of property taxes as something other than revenue? Answer: To avoid discussing spending cuts. Raising property taxes are, simply, the answer to balancing a budget. During the sessions on public finance, spending cuts were not mentioned once as a part of the budgeting process. Instead, the emphasis was that cities "must budget for services in good and bad markets," an attempt to justify very flawed government reasoning that the economy is irrelevant when considering tax increases.

American Experiment is indebted to our observer for monitoring the "training." While much more could be said, our source came away more convinced than ever that the LMC's goal is growing local government and its revenues.

"The training they provide is strategic to that end. The LMC is taxpayer funded through municipalities using tax dollars to pay LMC dues and to belong to the League's Insurance Trust. Taxpayers and the council members that represent them need to understand the LMC's liberal agenda and stop funding them. Until they do, the LMC will drive state policy in the legislature to support their growth agenda and will continue to groom public officials to advance it." ★

COVID vs. Lockdowns

The latter is apparently much deadlier, according to one liberal's scientific model.

A Minnesota biochemist and immunologist recently put up a billboard in south Minneapolis to tout his eye-popping COVID-19 modeling: lockdowns will kill almost two million more people than they will save.

Hugh McTavish, 58, started a non-profit organization called COVID Sanity (COVID-Sanity.org) to highlight the failure of elected officials — especially Gov. Tim Walz — to focus on protecting the elderly and those with preexisting conditions, while still allowing more business-friendly and socially-open policies for everyone else. The kicker: McTavish is a self-proclaimed liberal.

"If I'm contributing to Republicans winning elections, that would be bad," he says. "But I'm right and Walz is wrong."

McTavish, the author of 18 scientific journal articles and the inventor of 21 patents, insists lockdowns will prevent about 800,000 COVID deaths. But these restrictions will cause almost 2.6 million

deaths related to alcohol and drug abuse as well as suicide, while adding 24 million cases of depression. His calculations factor a variety of variables including federal data, university studies, COVID survival rates and U.S. population.

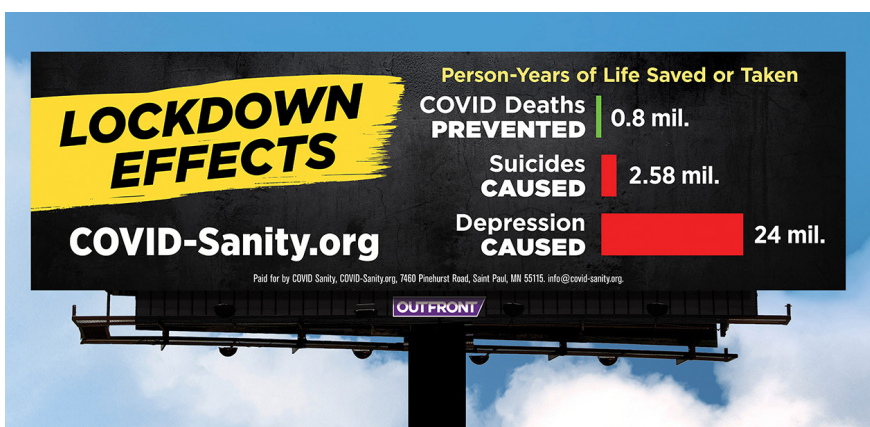
His data go on to say that COVID lockdowns, on average, extend life by just under a day while cutting our lifetimes by two to three days. That means, in the end, Americans will suffer a net loss of one or two days of their lives, because of an overreaction to the virus.

"I really think it's a lot like the Salem Witch Trials, where people go insane," he says. "We kind of did it with child abductions 40 years ago. Then we went nuts on daycare child abuse and some people are still in jail for completely implausible stories."

Church, tennis and poker nights with his buddies are the activities McTavish misses most. His friends continue their card games by Zoom, but McTavish won't play that way.

He's even thinking about leaving Minnesota for the first time since his family moved to the Chicago suburbs when he was nine. And where might he move? Florida. The Sunshine State does not have any strict lockdown laws and has not enforced anything of the sort since last May. ★

—Ryan Hiraki



Myth of the Money Tree

A monetary theory more Aristotle than Copernicus.



In February, the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) reported that the federal deficit is projected to total \$2.3 trillion in the 2021 fiscal year. That total does not include the \$1.9 trillion in so-called COVID-19 relief spending signed into law by President Biden in March. The public share of the national debt currently stands at a little above 100 percent of GDP — the CBO forecasts that this will hit 107 percent of GDP by 2031, the highest debt-to-GDP ratio in U.S. history.

Many see this as a problem, with increased government borrowing pushing up interest rates. But others view all this red ink with equanimity. As economist Stephanie Kelton argues in her new book, *The Deficit Myth: Modern*

Monetary Theory and the Birth of the People's Economy, in almost all instances federal deficits are good for the economy. “They are necessary.” Phew!

Kelton arrives at this reassuring conclusion via Modern Monetary Theory (MMT), which she claims could revolutionize economics in the same way that Copernicus revolutionized astronomy. MMT starts with the observation that a monetary sovereign like the federal government — a body that issues the currency its liabilities are denominated in — need never go bankrupt. It can meet whatever liabilities it incurs simply by issuing a sufficient nominal amount of currency. This is a truism, but MMTers argue that it frees the monetary sovereign

from worrying about things like debt crises because you can always print the money you need to pay your debts.

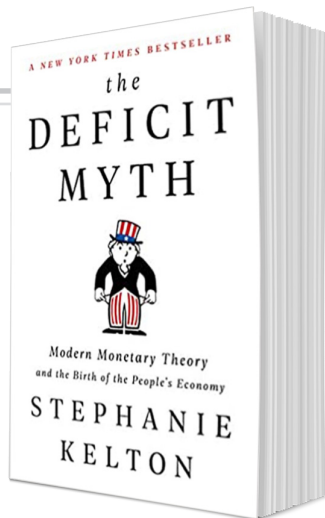
So, MMT amounts to this: You don’t have to worry about turning into Greece if you can turn into Zimbabwe instead.

If a monetary sovereign expands the money supply when output is depressed, say when unemployment is high, many macroeconomists would agree that it is output rather than prices that would increase. This is hardly revolutionary. Monetarists and New Keynesians would agree on this. Both, however, would also agree that when the monetary sovereign expands the money supply when output is close to capacity, say when unemployment is low, it is prices rather than output that would rise — otherwise known as inflation.

In other words, there is a point at which further money creation only generates inflation, not increases in output and higher standards of living. Indeed, Kelton admits this:

“Just because there are no financial constraints on the federal budget doesn’t mean there aren’t real limits to what the government can (and should) do. Every economy has its own internal speed limit, regulated by the availability of our real productive resources — the state of technology and the quantity and quality of its land, workers, factories, machine, and other materials. If the government tries to spend too much into an economy that’s already running at full speed, inflation will accelerate. There are limits.”

This belated acknowledgment of economic reality is fatal to Kelton’s claim for any great novelty for MMT. She writes:



“Just because there are no financial constraints on the federal budget doesn't mean there aren't real limits to what the government can (and should) do.”

“There is absolutely no good reason for Social Security benefits, for example, to ever face cuts. Our government will always be able to meet future obligations because it can never run out of money.” This is technically correct, but only in *nominal* terms. With inflation, that money might not get you much, and the effect will be a real cut in the purchasing power of your Social Security check.

Kelton raises this — “The question is, ‘What will that money buy?’” — but she instantly dismisses it with boilerplate about how, “We need to make sure that we're doing everything we can to manage our real resources and develop more sustainable methods of production as the babyboom generation ages out of the workforce.” You don't say?

So, what's the point of MMT? Where is the Copernican revolution? There isn't one. Instead we have rebadged monetarist/New Keynesianism for when unemployment is high and rebadged Mugabeism for when it is low.

Kelton offers examples in support of MMT, but where her theory is just underwhelming, her history is actively bad:

“As a share of gross domestic product

(GDP), the national debt was at its highest — 120 percent — in the period immediately following the Second World War. Yet, this was the same period during which the middle class was built, real median family income soared, and the next generation enjoyed a higher standard of living without the added burden of higher tax rates.”

Yes, the federal government ran up a considerable debt defeating Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan. But with victory over Japan in 1945, spending fell sharply: by 73 percent in real terms between 1945 and 1948. In seven of the 15 years to 1960, the government ran a budget surplus. And deficits were never large, averaging one percent of GDP. The economy grew faster than government, so federal spending fell as a share of GDP from 41 percent in 1945 to 17 percent in 1960. That Golden Age Kelton references was one of mostly sound government financial management.

We also are told that deficits “didn't dissuade John F. Kennedy from landing a man on the moon.” Again, this is true, but with these deficits came inflation, which rose from 1.4 percent in 1960 to 12.3 percent in 1974. These examples hardly support Kelton's case for vast deficits and their essential harmlessness.

There is an old joke: What does a parrot have in common with the Holy Roman Empire? The parrot isn't holy, Roman, or an empire. Modern Monetary Theory is much the same. It isn't very modern. Throughout history people have been saying that we would be rich if only we had more of the medium of exchange. It isn't monetary policy so much as a way of escaping the inevitabilities of fiscal policy. And its theoretical basis is a banal truism. It is simply the latest in a long line of claims to have found a Magic Money Tree for government. ★

—John Phelan



The Courts

Legal Relief

The Upper Midwest Law Center fights for clients against the ‘progressive’ agenda.

An activist fears for the safety of her friends and family. A salon owner was banned from cutting hair. And a pastor can’t even pray the way he wants.

Enter the Upper Midwest Law Center.

This Minnesota-based nonprofit organization provides essential legal services often out of reach for folks who only seek to enjoy the rights, liberties and freedoms envisioned by our Founding Fathers.

Doug Seaton, a longtime labor lawyer, founded UMLC two years ago while helping people he knew fight unions, getting donations to support the cause. Then he realized he needed something more broadly based and teamed with Center of the American Experiment Chairman Ron Eibensteiner and President John Hinderaker to make the law center a reality. (Both Hinderaker and Eibensteiner serve on the UMLC board.)

“We’ve got as bad a situation as anybody, as far as left-wing insanity goes,” he

says, referring specifically to government and public union issues.

Seaton hopes to hire another litigator this year to join him and James Dickey, whose eight years of experience include a significant background in constitutional law. Seaton envisions his office someday becoming a staple of justice in Wisconsin, Iowa and the Dakotas. But it all starts in the Twin Cities metro area, and the UMLC’s backyard is a hotbed of activity.

Take Cathy Spann, whose north Minneapolis neighborhood is still ravaged by violent crime after being burned and looted during the George Floyd riots.

In 2020, homicides were up 70 percent, gunshot victims up 105 percent, and carjackings 301 percent. And now the City Council is considering defunding the police, even though the number of available law enforcement officers is as low as 638, according to a recent Facebook post by Mayor Jacob Frey.

That’s about 100 below the minimum mandated in the City Charter, prompting UMLC to sue Minneapolis. The goal is to force Frey and the council to comply with their charter. “Criminals don’t hear, ‘Defund the police.’ What they’re thinking is, ‘There is no police,’” Spann says.

Their trial is set for April 22 and 23.

Two other clients, meanwhile, are waiting to find out if a judge will send their case to trial or to the Federal Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals.

One is Andrew Hulse, owner of 18/8 Fine Men’s Salons in Wayzata and Maple Grove. About 25 hard-working employees struggled to pay for food and essentials because Gov. Tim Walz shut down Hulse’s businesses while allowing others to stay open, even though hygiene standards at salons make them unlikely vectors of the coronavirus.

UMLC sued Walz, arguing he doesn’t have the power to pick winners and losers by shuttering Minnesota’s economy. Seaton and Dickey want the state to compensate Hulse for damages (although a specific amount has yet to be determined).

Finally, we have Pastor Mac Hammond of the Living Word Christian Center in Brooklyn Park. They are not seeking any damages. They only want to congregate in their house of worship.

No trial date has been set, but last year the U.S. Supreme Court ruled 5-4 to stop a New York executive order from limiting attendance at worship services in *Roman Catholic Diocese of Brooklyn v. Cuomo*. Will Minnesota’s governor respect this precedent?

He will, the UMLC believes, as Seaton and his team strive to fight for not only Hammond but more than a dozen other clients whose rights and liberties have been threatened.

“These are big cases,” Seaton says. “You can’t do these with a cookie cutter. You have to craft them carefully. We’ve got a lot to orchestrate.” ★

—Ryan Hiraki



Cathy Spann is one of eight north Minneapolis residents who are clients of the Upper Midwest Law Center. They are suing the city for not putting enough police officers on the streets.



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≡ EDUCATION ALERT

Educrats Unleashed

A cabal of progressives wants to rewrite how students learn about their American heritage.

By Katherine Kersten
and Catrin Wigfall

Minnesota parents, are you ready for the coming “woke” invasion of your child’s public school? By 2022, as your first grader is learning that $2 + 2 = 4$, the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) intends to mandate that she also “learn to recognize” “stereotypes,” “biased speech,” and “injustice at the institutional or systemic level.”

Your middle schooler will be drilled in how his “identity” is a function of his skin color. Your high schooler will be required to explain that Europeans invented “whiteness” and that America’s 19th-century westward expansion was the shameful product of “whiteness, Christianity, and capitalism.”

It’s all part of Gov. Tim Walz’s aggressive campaign to replace academic knowledge and skills with the cultivation of politically correct attitudes and commitments in

our state's public schools. His vehicle is the new first draft of K-12 social studies standards that MDE is proposing to replace the current standards. The standards lay out what students must "satisfactorily complete" to graduate from high school and are revised every 10 years.

If the draft standards are adopted, the next generation of Minnesota citizens will not only be uninformed — but scandalously *misinformed* — about our state's and nation's history and democratic institutions. They will, however, be programmed to become the next generation of "woke" social activists, having spent their public school years immersed in the lingo of the progressive left.

MDE's crusade to hijack Minnesota schools in service of a political agenda is advancing in the name of warm fuzzies like "inclusion," "empathy" and "cultural affirmation." Yet behind this smokescreen, the Department of Educa-

tion's hand-picked Social Studies Standards Committee members — overwhelmingly activists and ideological zealots — have declared their deep animus against the American project and their intent to remake its fundamental institutions.

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Listen to Jonathan Hamilton, one of the drafting committee's 44 members and a professor at Macalester College, who has called for elimination of "Minnesota's Eurocentric, white-washed curricu-

lum." "White supremacy" is "a system of relations that permeates all [American] institutions" and "curricula is a primary mechanism of white supremacy in schools [sic]," he declared in MinnPost. Committee member Jose Alvillar concurs. "The revised standards show a commitment to acknowledge...that we as a state challenge the Eurocentric pedagogy that prevails in our education system," he told the *Pioneer Press*. Alvillar is an Education Justice Organizer at Navigate MN, an "intersectional, women/queer Latinx led organization committed to social justice."

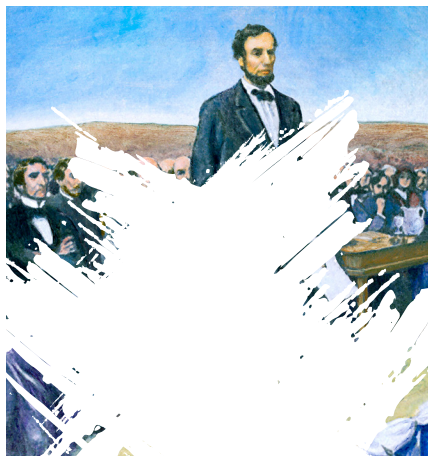
Hamilton, Alvillar and their colleagues are not calling for a greater emphasis on African or Asian history. In fact, the draft 2020 standards largely eliminate earlier standards' far stronger focus on these topics. Their ambition is more grandiose. They regard the new standards as nothing less than a vehicle to "change" how Minnesota's young people "think, understand

and act in the world," as Hamilton puts it.

MDE's standards drafters reject the very notion of historical, evidence-based *truth*. They view history as a one-dimensional power struggle, in which interest groups push competing, subjective "narratives" based on "axes of stratification" such as skin color, class and sexuality. In their eyes, Minnesota's history classrooms are a kind of racial spoils system, and they intend to "develop counternarratives" in a quest for what Hamilton labels "curriculum justice."

The new standards are merely the "first step" in a larger campaign for sweeping social and political change, according to Aaliyah Hodge, another committee member. "Work to create a more equitable system doesn't end with the social studies standards," she wrote in the *Star Tribune*. "[I]n fact it is just the beginning."

Unfortunately, Big Education's campaign to replace education with indoctrination is ramping up as Minnesota students' academic skills are in free fall. In 2019, 40 percent couldn't read at grade level, and 45 percent couldn't do grade-level math. Since then, COVID-19 has dealt a devastating setback to many who are struggling to maintain basic skills.



The revolution underway

MDE educrats acknowledge that the proposed standards mark a "shift in approach to standards and social studies learning." A comparison with Minnesota's original statewide social studies standards, approved by the legislature in 2004, reveals that "shift" is in fact a revolution.

The 2004 standards took a "warts-and-all approach" to American history. But their primary purpose was to ensure that students "gain the knowledge and skills" necessary to "protect and maintain freedom," in a nation built by "individuals united in an on-going quest for liberty, freedom, justice, and opportunity."

The 2004 standards focused on ensuring that students understood the chronological story of the key events, actors and ideas that shaped American democracy and the larger world. For example,



The Committee



Ignoring the mandate that the social studies standards committee include a broad cross section of Minnesotans, MDE largely avoided parents, school board members and the business community.

high schoolers were expected to “understand the origins,” “course” and “impact” of World War II, including leaders and events like Hitler, the Lend-Lease program, the Battle of Midway, the Normandy Invasion, Churchill, Stalin, the Holocaust and the Nuremberg Trials.

Minnesota’s current standards, adopted in 2011, take a similar approach.

The vision of social studies instruction as “education for democratic citizenship” was widely shared at the time the 2004 standards were adopted. The American Federation of Teachers’ “Education for Democracy” project, for example, included former President Bill Clinton, Sen. Edward Kennedy, and the presidents of the National Education Association and the NAACP among its signers.

“We must transmit to each new generation the political vision of liberty and equality that unites us as Americans, and a deep loyalty to the political institutions put together to fulfill that vision,” declared its Statement of Principles.

As citizens of a democratic republic, we are part of the noblest effort in history. Our children must learn, and we must teach them, the knowledge, values and habits that will best protect and extend this precious heritage.

The Walz administration’s proposed 2020 standards take a very different stance. They regard America as deeply flawed and in need of radical reform. The standards’ preamble states that the purpose of social studies education is to prepare students to address our nation’s “powerful social, cultural and political inequities,” by “examining their identities,” becom-

It’s hard to see this is the Holocaust when the image is obscured, so imagine how difficult it will be for Minnesota students to understand its significance if it’s not taught in classrooms at all.



ing “conscious and critical of their own biases and those of the larger society,” and examining various inequities” “connections to other axes of stratification, including gender, race, class, sexuality, and legal status.”

The draft history standards are organized not by historical periods, but in terms of five tenets of progressive ideology. For example, one standard requires students to understand how “identity (gender, race, religion, and culture)... influence historical perspective [sic].”

The committee that is creating Minnesota’s new social studies standards — filled with radically woke proposals — appears to violate state statute because it lacks the perspective of parents, business leaders, and subject-area experts to ensure children receive a well-rounded education.

Education Commissioner Mary Cathryn Ricker, appointed by Gov. Tim Walz, chose an inordinate number of progressives fighting for “equity” as well as Native American tribe members, neglecting to incorporate truly diverse viewpoints among the 44 applicants she picked. As a result, tenets of history, such as the Holocaust, two world wars, and the Civil War, became lower priorities.

The committee includes one trained historian — a specialist on African slave religions — but no one who specializes in 20th-century history or America’s founding era. Ricker has since resigned.

Minnesota statute outlines who the commissioner must recruit to be represented on the committee, including a broad swath of educators, school administrators, school board members, parents, and business community

Another directs them to “reflect upon the roots of contemporary social and environmental problems.” The study of history is incidental, and it takes place within this ideological framework.

Thus, fifth graders study the American Revolution in terms of its “impact” on “different groups within the 13 colonies” — including “Women, Patriots, Loyalists, indigenous people, enslaved Africans, free blacks” — and are instructed to “identify what narratives are absent.”

High schoolers study the Civil War in terms of “how indigenous people participated in and were affected” by it. The standards don’t cover the main figures and events of the war itself, so this (along with slavery and the events leading up to secession) is the only context in which students will learn about it.

Students do not study World War II at all. They do touch on the Cold War, but will be unable to do so competently since they will know virtually nothing about the causes, events and outcome of the war that gave rise to it.

members.

Committee members should also reflect expertise in the different disciplines of social studies, and represent geographic, racial and linguistic diversity, according to the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE).

Instead, Ricker, who says she wants to return to the classroom, handpicked a group that acknowledged the MDE has made a “shift in approach” to teaching social studies. Its first proposal replaces many key pieces of history, civics and world education with controversial and hard-to-measure standards taught through a lens rooted in a metanarrative and a divisive and narrow worldview.

State statute requires academic standards and benchmarks to be “clear, concise, objective, measurable, and grade-level appropriate,” and align with the knowledge and skills students need for career and college readiness.

But many benchmarks do not appear to fit such criteria. For example, first graders are expected to “explore how individuals and groups in the past have fought against bias and discrimination through social justice movements.” Another first-grade benchmark says students must “learn to recognize unfairness, stereotypes, and bias,” and a high school benchmark says students must “develop a respectful awareness about how ideas and norms about gender have changed over time,” by no means measurable language.

Likewise, a fifth-grade benchmark calls colonization and settlement in North America the “exploitation and genocide of indigenous people and theft of indigenous lands” — hardly objective given the negative language in which the benchmark is couched. ■

What is driving this?

The ideology that powers the draft standards is “racial identity politics,” a core tenet of today’s fashionable “woke” agenda. The standards drill relentlessly into students’ heads that their skin color defines who they are and how they see the world — directly contradicting Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s colorblind ideal.

Indoctrination in identity politics starts in kindergarten, where five-year-olds will “identify surface and deep characteristics of different ways of being (identity).” Fourth graders are coached on how one’s “identity” and “biases influence decisions about how to use a space.” Seventh graders are exhorted to “define race and ethnicity from different perspectives and make connections to one’s own ways of being (identities).”

By high school, students must “explain” — parrot back is more like it — “the social construction of race” and “assess how social policies and economic forces offer privilege or systematic oppressions for racial/ethnic groups.”

The standards portray America as a greedy, “imperialist” nation, permeated by “powerful social, cultural and political

inequities.” Students are led to conclude unjust institutions must be transformed.

They are primed for political activism from the earliest ages. Kindergartners, for example, are groomed to be not loyal or patriotic, but reflexively skeptical members of our nation’s “adversary culture.”

Currently, for example, Minnesota kindergartners learn about the Pledge of Allegiance and first graders about American flag etiquette. But the draft 2020 standards omit mention of both.

Instead, kindergartners are required to “describe symbols, songs and traditions that identify Minnesota’s Anishinaabe and Dakota tribes and communities, the state and nation.” (“State” and “nation” are merely afterthoughts here.) The standards imply that these tribes are our state’s rightful inhabitants, and in later grades students will learn that white “colonists” seized “the land now known as Minnesota” by “theft” and “genocide.”

Over and over, the standards focus students’ attention on the goals and tactics of left-wing political activists, present them as models for emulation, and exhort students to follow their lead.

For example, fifth graders are required to “investigate how groups (Example:

women, religious groups, civil rights groups, indigenous peoples, LGBTQ) have advocated for access to greater rights.” Sixth graders must “describe the goals of activists in their quest for their voice to be heard, especially anti-war, racial minorities, immigrants/refugees, women, LGBTQ, and indigenous people.”

High schoolers are immersed in the full gamut of “woke” political causes. For instance, they must:

- Identify “successful strategies in the environmental movement” and “make a plan” to “organize local community action”;
- study sexual identity activists’ campaigns, and exhibit a “respectful awareness” for “how ideas and norms about gender have changed over time”;

Unfortunately, Walz’s campaign to replace education with indoctrination is ramping up as Minnesota students’ academic skills are in free fall.

- “analyze how resistance movements in the U.S. have organized” against “oppression” and “apply” these groups’ “successful principles” at “the school and local level”; and
- “take action to affect policy” on “historically marginalized communities of color and indigenous nations.”

After years of such propaganda, high school students are required to “draw lessons from the past in order to imagine and work toward an equitable and caring future.” However, this “equitable and caring” vision will not be their own, but what was spoon-fed to them for 12 years.

The Walz administration’s goal here is not to equip Minnesota’s next generation of citizens to reach their own conclusions on hot-button social and political issues. It’s to program them to line up behind

‘Respectful Engagement’

About 80 percent of public comments to the proposed social studies standards were provided through American Experiment’s ‘Raise Our Standards MN’ campaign. An MDE director labeled it ‘white supremacy language.’

the “woke” agenda. Consequently, the standards minimize or omit information that could prompt students to question the progressive narrative.

Why are the standards silent on pivotal events such as World War II? Likely, in part, because the Normandy Invasion and the American-led defeat of Hitler’s Third Reich place our nation in a heroic light. Absent too is the story of America’s gargantuan, decades-long effort to overcome the legacy of slavery and Jim Crow, including *Brown v. Board of Education*, the 1960s civil rights acts, affirmative action, nationwide busing for school desegregation, and multi-trillion-dollar social programs.

Similarly, when students study the 13th Amendment, which abolished slavery, the standards say they must “mak[e] sure to connect this history to persistent discrimination and inequity in the present.”

At the same time, the standards fail to give young people the broad historical context they need to put their own nation’s flaws into perspective. They learn nothing, for example, about the centuries-long Arab and African slave trades, or 20th-century totalitarian movements and atrocities like Soviet gulags, the Nazi Holocaust, the Chinese Cultural Revolution and the Sept. 11 terror attacks.

The Social Studies Standards Committee

The Social Studies Standards Committee is composed primarily of people who represent demographic special interest groups or “equity” organizations with an aggressive political agenda. Native Americans are about one percent of Minnesota’s population, but made up almost 20 percent of the committee that drafted the standards.

The committee’s only trained historian is not an expert on America’s founding era or 20th-century history. She is a specialist on African slave religions, and the religious and medical practices of enslaved Africans in the Caribbean, including “obeah” — defined by Merriam-Webster as “a system of belief... characterized by the use of magic ritual to ward

More than 5,000 comments from concerned parents and community leaders on the first draft of social studies standards were dismissed during the opening round of public input, labeled as “white supremacy language,” and suggested for deletion from the record altogether.

This suppression of opposing opinion conflicts with state law, which requires the Minnesota Department of Education to solicit extensive public feedback on the draft standards before the commissioner reviews and approves a final draft.

It’s just the beginning of a process to incorporate new public school social studies standards that takes about one to two years to complete. And the committee is off to a questionable start.

Center of the American Experiment helped facilitate feedback during the first public comment period through its “Raise Our Standards MN” campaign. It included a letter to MDE highlighting areas of concern in the first draft of social studies standards and benchmarks.

This accounted for 80 percent of the public feedback received on the first

off misfortune or to cause harm.”

Not surprisingly, the standards include a strikingly disproportionate emphasis on indigenous people, and many benchmarks forthrightly promote activist Native American political priorities. For example, the draft begins with a new “woke” fad — a “land acknowledgement.”

Minnesota is the contemporary and ancestral home of the Anishinaabe and Dakota peoples, and social studies education on this land will acknowledge and honor their contemporary and historical voices.

What will it mean to filter all social studies instruction — in citizenship, geography, economics and history — through this narrow ethnic lens? One thing is clear: Students will get a highly romanticized version of Native American life and history.

For example, first graders will be required to “describe how one’s sense of place is developed, including wisdom from Dakota and Anishinaabe voices.” (Native Americans are the only people the standards describe as having “wisdom.”)

The standards omit any mention of these tribes’ warrior culture, their practice of slavery, and their violent seizure of their “home” land from the Iowa and Ojibwe peoples sometime after 1700.

A primary goal of the 2020 standards appears to be to accustom Minnesota students to the vocabulary, categories of thought and priorities of Native American political activists. These include reclaiming land, removing statues, renaming landmarks and promoting “oral history” that is inconsistent with the historical record. To this end, as fourth graders study states, capitals and major American cities, they must learn on which people’s land “these places were built.” An entire anchor standard and 39 benchmarks — three times the number of the current standards — pertain to the Anishinaabe and Dakota people.

The harm being done

MDE’s substitution of indoctrination for education in our state’s K-12 schools will do incalculable harm.

By recruiting students into “identity politics,” it will drive toxic wedges between children, create frictions and resentments

draft. But the committee was dismissive following the first round of public input.

During a virtual public committee meeting in January, Director of Academic Standards Doug Paulson labeled the concerns Minnesotans voiced in the letter as “white supremacy language.” No example was given. Committee member Danyika Leonard asked if they should just do a “select-all delete sort of thing.”

That is not consistent with the committee’s obligations. In fact, it contradicts its opening statement in the draft standards about the importance of “respectfully engaging with different perspectives,” a kindergarten benchmark on “listening to others,” and a third-grade benchmark on “respecting diverse viewpoints.”

Commissioner Ricker responded by testifying to legislators that the second draft will include additional “fundamental points of history.”

MDE officials have also stated the first draft was meant to focus on the 22 anchor standards, not the benchmarks. But the first draft includes only five standards dedicated to history, which pales in comparison to the 23 history standards currently being taught in Minnesota schools. And with nearly 400 benchmarks in the first draft, it’s difficult to comprehend why the committee excluded key events such as the Holocaust, the largest act of genocide in the 20th century, but included references to the genocide of indigenous peoples.

MDE’s first draft concedes that it is neither complete nor final, but it makes no mention of adding more history benchmarks in later drafts. Instead, the plan was to add “further clarifications, connections to local contexts, and/or examples” to the benchmarks in later drafts. But examples are optional and are not required to be taught by state statute — unlike the definitive standards and benchmarks. ■

that permeate their school day, and amplify the depression and anxiety that — as social psychologist Jonathan Haidt has documented — already afflict so many of our young people.

Minority students will suffer most. They will come to see themselves as victims, instead of learning the “success formula” — character, resilience and hard work — that has lifted so many, both white and black, even in the face of discrimination and adversity.

The shift will also harm teachers, a growing number of whom are fleeing public schools rather than teach — and endure a school climate twisted by — this false and grim vision.

Finally, the new racist ideology is deadly for our democratic way of life. America’s freedom and prosperity are based, not on shared race or ethnicity, but on an allegiance to shared principles — including human beings’ unique dignity and unalienable rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

The Walz administration’s “us vs. them” ideology, taken to its logical conclusion, denies the very possibility of democratic governance. If we are born into perpetu-

ally warring racial groups, as it claims, we can neither understand one another nor reason together about the common good.

The standards committee attempts to justify its “woke” ideology on grounds that “students of color don’t see themselves” in school curricula. Yet the promises of America’s founding documents are for all Americans. Frederick Douglass, a towering civil rights hero and former slave, lauded the Constitution as “a glori-

ous liberty document,” while Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., hailed the Declaration of Independence as a “promissory note to which every American was to fall heir.”

The millions who flock here from Africa and Asia embrace this vision. Today, Nigerian and Ghanaian Americans have higher median household incomes than white Americans, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

The standards committee rejects education that focuses on the origins and evolution of our democratic republic, denouncing it as “Eurocentric.” Yet the standards of equality and human rights by which its members claim to judge America — and find it woefully wanting — arose in the West, and only the West.

The MDE committee wants to cut down the tree of Western Civilization, but they still want its fruits.

Historian Daniel Boorstin warned that if Americans fail to grasp the realities of comparative world history, we will be “left with nothing but abstractions, nothing but baseless utopias to compare ourselves with.”

Gov. Walz’s Department of Education is in the process of injecting a toxic ideology into the civic bloodstream of Minnesota. His “Due North” education plan and budget for the 2022-23 biennium will expand the radical agenda of the draft social studies standards throughout the state’s K-12 education system.

Minnesotans must hold our governor accountable. This mess can’t be fixed by tinkering around the edges. The whole thing must go. ★



Katherine Kersten, a writer and attorney, is a senior policy fellow at Center of the American Experiment. She served as a Metro columnist for the *Star Tribune* (Minneapolis) from 2005 to 2008 and as an opinion columnist for the paper between 1996 and 2013. She was a founding director of the Center and served as its chair from 1996 to 1998.



Catrin Wigfall is a policy fellow at Center of the American Experiment. She is the director of Educated Teachers MN and Employee Freedom MN. Catrin spent two years teaching 5th grade general education and 6th grade Latin in Arizona as a Teach for America corps member before using her classroom experience to transition back into education policy work.



The
THINKING
MINNESOTA
POLL



YOU ARE ONLY YOUNG ONCE

Young voters skew strikingly more liberal on a variety of issues.

The latest *Thinking Minnesota* Poll discovered that young Minnesotans voiced strikingly different opinions from all other age groups on issues such as education, culture and even tax policy.

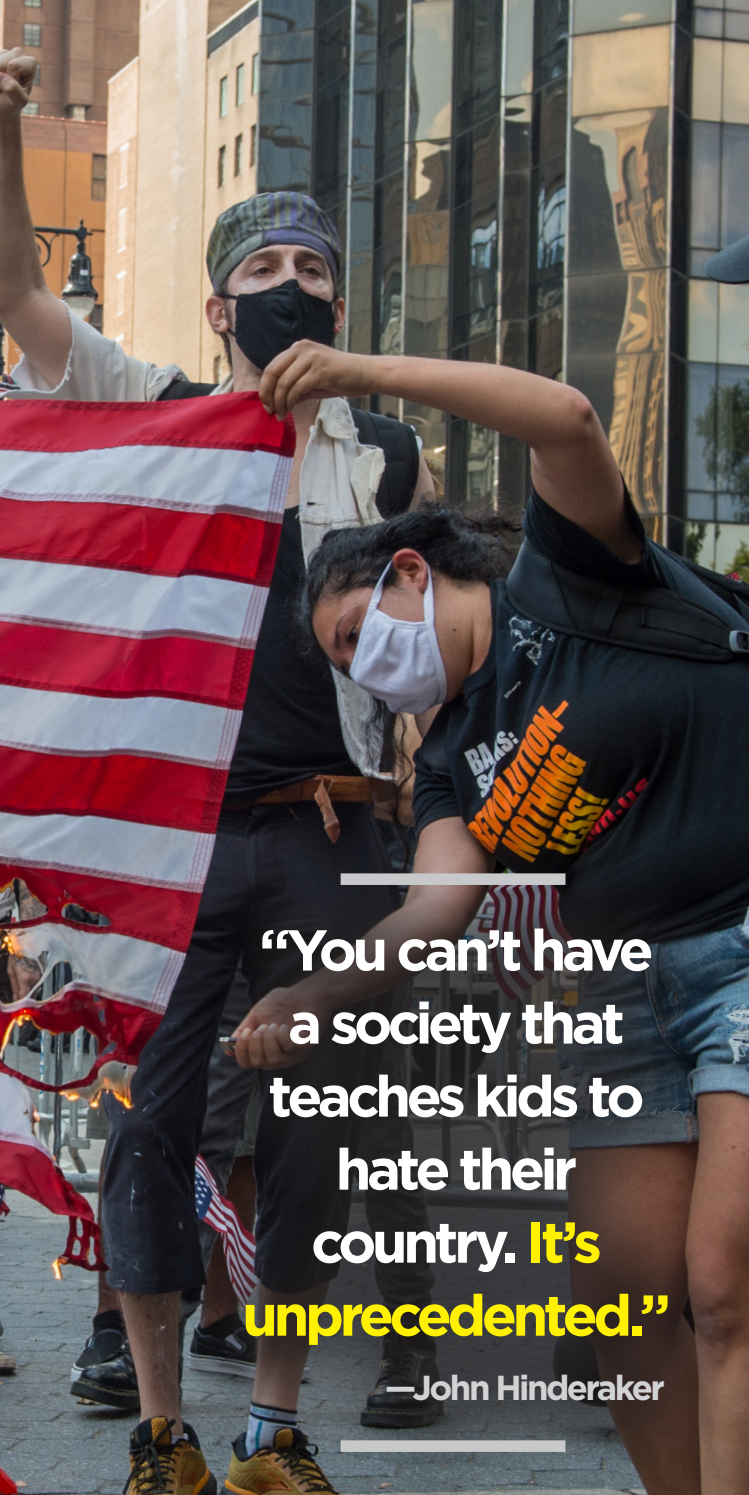
Voters ages 18 to 34 stand out as the only subset that favors a curriculum teaching students that America's Westward Expansion was oppressive (68 percent) and that our country's history is rooted in systemic racism (65 percent). And a filibuster-proof majority (63 percent) in a more micro subset — women, ages 18 to 54 — expect our kids to learn that systemic racism

is the reason we're all here today.

Young adults are also the lone group with a majority that wants to rename famous landmarks throughout the state (54 percent), and the single subset that is both lax and ill-informed on Minnesota's exorbitant tax rates.

The millennial/Generation Z demographic made up about 20 percent of the voters polled, the same percentage as the survey's four other groups (ages 35 to 44, 45 to 54, 55 to 64 and 65-plus).

But the average of the latter categories shows that only 40



“You can’t have a society that teaches kids to hate their country. It’s unprecedented.”

—John Hinderaker

percent feel westward expansion was oppressive, just 42 percent think systemic racism is the foundation of our country’s history, and a mere 30 percent want places like Fort Snelling to take a new name.

American Experiment President John Hinderaker says this is

About the pollster

Rob Autry, founder of Meeting Street Insights, is one of the nation’s leading pollsters and research strategists.

FIGURE 1: VOTERS ARE MOST IN FAVOR OF INCREASING FOCUS ON INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND INSTITUTIONAL INJUSTICES, BUT STRONGLY OPPOSE DECREASED FOCUS ON HISTORY.

“Please tell me whether you FAVOR or OPPOSE each of the following proposed revisions to Minnesota’s social studies standards for K-12 public schools.”

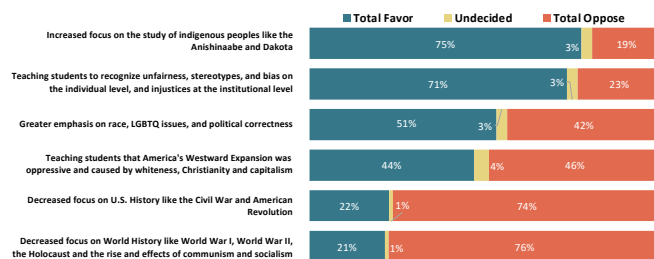
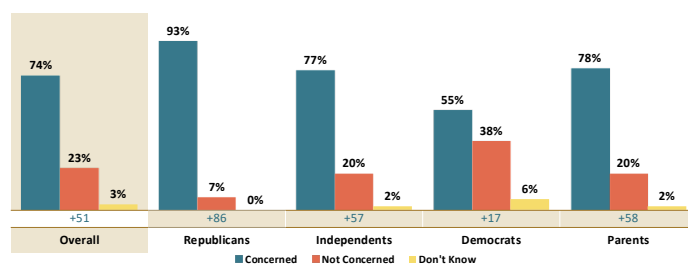


FIGURE 2: AFTER HEARING MORE ABOUT THE PROPOSED REVISIONS TO THE SOCIAL STUDIES STANDARDS, THREE-FOURTHS OF MINNESOTANS SAY THEY ARE CONCERNED ABOUT IT.

“Now, thinking generally about these proposed revisions to Minnesota’s K-12 social studies standards, how concerned are you about the direction and choices of the committee? Would you say you are very concerned, somewhat concerned, not that concerned, or not at all concerned?”



more evidence that leftists want to destroy America.

“Only they don’t say destroy,” he says. “They say, ‘Fundamentally transform.’ You can’t have a society that teaches kids to hate their country. It’s unprecedented.”

Meeting Street Insights, a polling company based in Charleston, S.C., interviewed 500 registered voters with a mix of cell phones and landlines from Feb. 16 to 18. The poll’s margin of error is +/- 4.38 percent.

There were, of course, commonalities among the groups.

On increasing focus of indigenous peoples, 88 percent of the

FIGURE 3: ONE OUT OF THREE PARENTS SAY THEY ARE LESS LIKELY TO SEND THEIR CHILD TO PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN MINNESOTA IF THESE PROPOSED STANDARDS ARE ADOPTED.

“And would these types of proposed standards make you MORE LIKELY or LESS LIKELY to send your child or children to Minnesota’s public schools, or does it make no difference one way or another?”

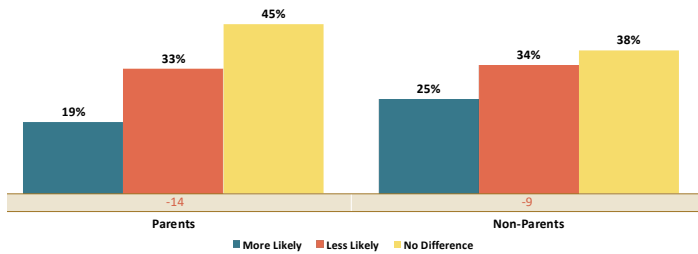


FIGURE 4: MINNESOTANS ARE EVENLY DIVIDED ON WHETHER PUBLIC SCHOOLS SHOULD TEACH THAT AMERICA IS ROOTED IN SYSTEMIC RACISM.

“And, should children in Minnesota’s public schools be taught that America’s history is rooted in systemic racism?”

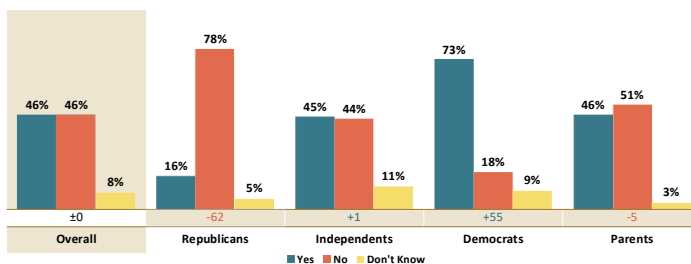
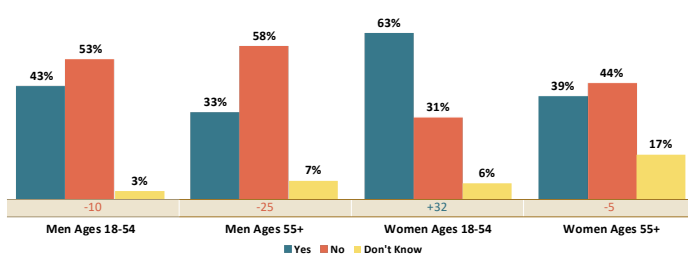


FIGURE 5: YOUNG WOMEN ARE THE MOST LIKELY DEMOGRAPHIC TO SUPPORT TEACHING SYSTEMIC RACISM IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

Systemic racism beliefs by gender/age



“Our young people’s deficit in historical knowledge is markedly worse today. **We’d better correct that fast, or we risk losing all that makes our nation exceptional.**”

—Katherine Kersten

youngest voters support it, while 73 percent of all other age brackets support it.

The outcomes were similar on the issue of teaching students to recognize unfairness, stereotypes and biases, at 80 percent (young) and 70 percent (older age bracket average).

And overwhelming majorities across the board oppose decreased focus on world and U.S. history, including the Civil War and World War II.

Youth and taxes

Like cultural and curricular issues, millennials and Gen Zers tend to think differently about taxes.

While their older counterparts are about split on raising the state’s corporate income tax, the young ones are quite certain, to the tune of 70 percent, there should be an increase.

With income taxes, they’re too high for only 37 percent of our youngest voters, with 52 percent of them saying the rates are about right. For everyone else, 55 percent say the government takes too much of their income and 40 percent say it’s the right amount.

The data become more interesting, however, when respondents learn that Minnesotans pay the fifth-highest income taxes

National testing data from 30 years ago showed that a majority of American high school seniors **could not identify Winston Churchill or Joseph Stalin.**



FIGURE 6: BY A 26-POINT MARGIN, MINNESOTA VOTERS OPPOSE RENAMING KEY LANDMARKS.

“As you may know, there have been proposals to rename several high profile landmarks in Minnesota, including Lake Calhoun and Fort Snelling, because their names may be offensive to some people. With that in mind, do you FAVOR or OPPOSE the renaming of well-known landmarks and buildings in order to promote what some say is social justice?”

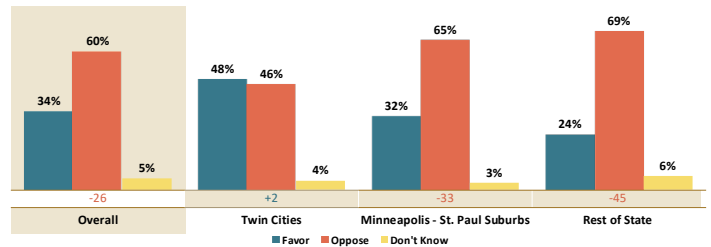


FIGURE 7: TAXING E-CIGARETTE SALES IS THE MOST POPULAR ITEM ON THE TAX PLAN.

“Please tell me whether you FAVOR or OPPOSE that specific aspect of Gov. Tim Walz’s new tax plan.”

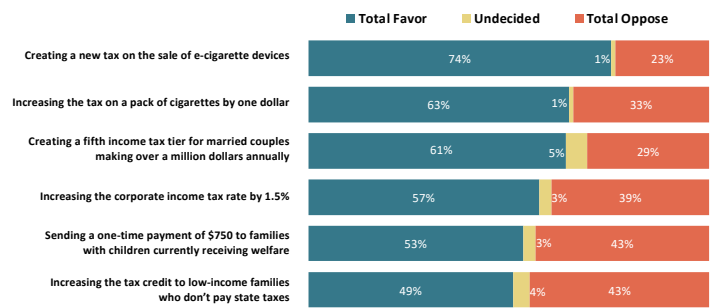
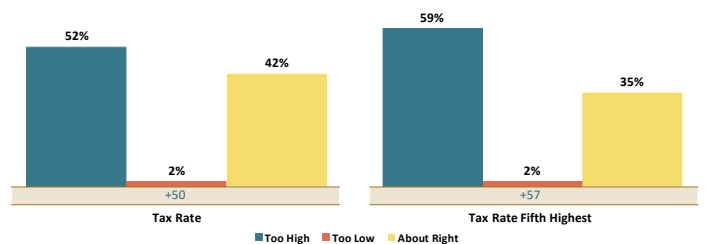


FIGURE 8: A MAJORITY OF VOTERS SAY INCOME TAXES ARE TOO HIGH.

“Now, thinking specifically about state income tax rates here in Minnesota, based on what you know, would you say Minnesota’s current individual income tax rates are too high, too low or about right?”

“As you may know, Minnesota’s top individual income tax rate is the fifth highest in the country. With that in mind, do you think Minnesota’s income tax rates are too high, too low, or about right?”



in the nation.

Now 56 percent of the Gen Z/millennial group say taxes are too high, a jump of almost 20 percentage points. Voters of all other ages averaged an increase of less than five points when told about their state’s high tax rates.

Democratic divide

Another striking outcome of the poll was the dramatic split among Democrats when it comes to renaming landmarks.

Almost three-quarters of the party’s base wants to follow the action taken for Bde Maka Ska. (It used to be called Lake Calhoun.) But only 43 percent of voters who lean Democrat want the same. Overall, 60 percent of Democrats like name changes.

It’s a huge contrast with Republicans — 90 percent oppose name changes, including 97 percent of the base and 83 percent of moderates.

American Experiment Senior Policy Fellow Katherine Kersten believes the far left, including young voters, just don’t know the facts. It’s likely the reason they complained about John Calhoun being a slaveowner when they successfully pushed for Lake Calhoun to become Bde Maka Ska, she says, despite the fact that wasn’t even the lake’s Dakota name and the Dakota Indians practiced slavery themselves.

Kersten went on to cite another troubling tidbit: National testing data from 30 years ago showed that a majority of American high school seniors could not identify Winston Churchill or Joseph Stalin.

“And our young people’s deficit in historical knowledge is markedly worse today,” she says. “We’d better correct that fast, or we risk losing all that makes our nation exceptional.” ★

A person wearing a colorful knit hat, a dark jacket, and pink pants is seen from behind, using a long-handled brush to clean snow off a row of solar panels. The panels are dark and arranged in a grid, with snow piled up around them. The background shows a vast, snow-covered landscape under a clear sky.

≡ Q&A

Renewable **RESISTANCE**

American Experiment Policy Fellow Isaac Orr interviews renowned author and filmmaker **Robert Bryce** about the misconceptions surrounding wind and solar energy, their negative impact on poor, rural and minority communities, and how people are fighting back.

American Experiment Policy Fellow Isaac Orr interviews Texas-based author and filmmaker Robert Bryce about the growing rebellion against renewables in rural America, how energy issues could help bridge the rural-urban divide, and the future of energy.

Robert Bryce is an author, journalist, podcaster, film producer and public speaker who has covered the energy industry for 30 years. His articles have appeared in numerous publications including *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, *National Review*, *Field & Stream* and *Austin Chronicle*.

Robert is also the author of an upcoming study for Center of the American Experiment entitled, “Not In Our Backyard: Rural America Is Fighting Back Against Large-Scale Renewable Energy Projects.”

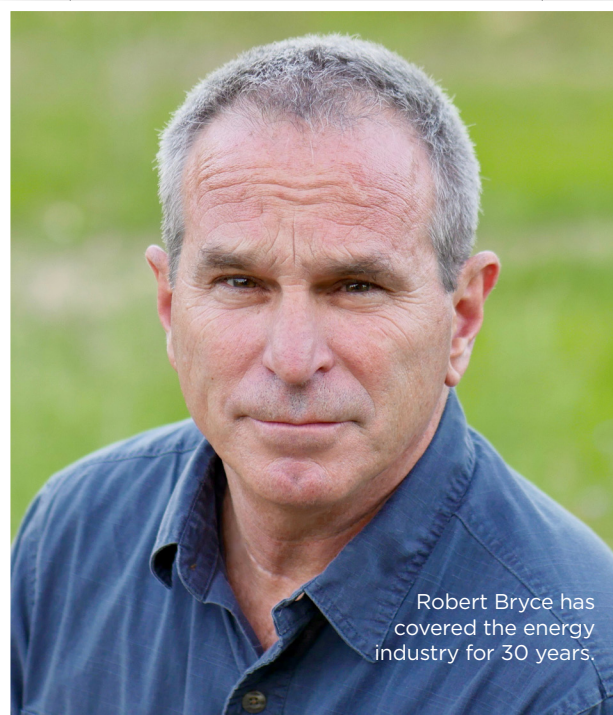
Robert, in the American Experiment report that you wrote, you note that renewable energy is politically popular. Polling data show that about 70 percent of Americans want more wind energy and 80 percent want more solar. Who are these people and why would anyone oppose them?

I think there’s a natural affinity for them. I recently interviewed a woman in London and asked her, “Well, why are renewables so popular?” She said, “It’s that word, renewable. Everybody loves that word.” When you add this to the natural affinity people have for wind and solar, they get the feeling that these energy sources are renewable, therefore they’re infinite, and must be good.

There is also, frankly, very good social marketing of wind and solar. You see it in beer commercials, in pickup truck commercials. There’s this idea, “Oh, it’s spinning out there and it’s great.” Those

polling numbers are indicative of the general sentiment about renewables. People just like it. It’s like motherhood and apple pie, who could be opposed?

The problem is that the vast majority of renewable energy infrastructure is going up in rural areas that aren’t benefitting from it.



Robert Bryce has covered the energy industry for 30 years.

“Small landowners sometimes feel like they’re being pushed around and having to fight against some large corporations who aren’t from the neighborhood.”

Would it be fair to say that urbanites and suburbanites like wind and solar because they aren’t around the infrastructure?

That’s the big issue. People like the romantic idea of renewables, they like the

concept, but the reality is a whole other thing. The best resources for wind and solar are in flyover country, but you have to move that electricity to the big cities.

The cities are predominantly run by Democrats, and they want the renewables because climate change is a big part of the party’s platform. But there’s an idea that says “Oh, we’ll just put the infrastructure in rural areas.”

Well, it’s the rural Republican voters who are going to see decreased land values as well as high voltage transmission lines, big areas covered with solar panels. They’ve looked at this and said, “This is a bad deal for us, and we don’t want it.” We see this from Maine to Hawaii.

What are the main concerns that rural Americans are facing when it comes to renewable development?

The main concern is that their property values will fall. There are numerous studies that validate these concerns, and I cite them in the report for American Experiment. We’ve seen land values near wind turbines go down after they’re installed. That’s one of

their main issues, but it’s also tourism, it’s also viewsheds.

Also, small landowners sometimes feel like they’re being pushed around and having to fight against some large corporations who aren’t from the neighborhood, aren’t from the state in many cases, who are saying, “Well, we’re going to put these wind turbines near you, and you don’t have a say.”

I’ve talked to a lot of rural landowners and office holders, and they express the same sentiment: “These big players are coming in to push us around, and we don’t like it.” I heard that definitively in Madison County, Iowa, which in December passed an ordinance effectively

banning wind turbines. They got sued by MidAmerican Energy, a subsidiary of Berkshire Hathaway, Warren Buffett's company. There's a David versus Goliath attitude that's part of the fight.

You said that from Maine to Hawaii people who are around these projects are fighting back. What are they doing?

One thing I didn't understand fully until I wrote the report were the measures that local communities are taking to try and fend off these projects.

One of the most interesting ways was in Michigan, where a number of local towns developed heliports. They would survey out a little piece of land and then apply for an application for a heliport. Well, that boxed out wind projects for a certain radius because they need to be far enough away from the heliport.

Local communities and county governments have also passed ordinances limiting the noise a wind turbine can make. That's a big issue because of the negative effects that noise has on human and animal health. They also pass rules regarding setbacks from property lines. In Madison County, Iowa, the county board of supervisors passed a 1.5-mile setback from a neighboring property line.

How many communities have said, "No, thank you," at this point?

My count today is 293 since 2015 when I started keeping track of these initiatives. It started as a simple spreadsheet, and we're going to publish it on American Experiment's website when the report comes out. I'm proud of it. I've maintained it for seven years, and I've done it because I care about it. I care about it because I've talked to so many people who've been hurt. I've talked to so many small town mayors, small town councilmen, county commissioners who are offended, they're mad.

I've also talked to people who've been — because of the health issues, because of the sleeplessness, because of the noise — driven out of their homes, including Dave and Rose Enz from Brown County, Wisconsin.

They abandoned their home and now



"It's one reason I'm a fan of nuclear...that incredible power density you get from splitting the atom."

they're living largely in an RV. To hear their story, I mean, you'd have to have a heart of stone not to care. This blithe ignorance and dismissal of people like them, it makes me mad. It motivates me. I feel a responsibility to tell their story.

You note that hundreds of communities have now banned or restricted renewable energy development. How much land do you think it would take to implement the green dream?

Research that goes back for more than a decade, including Vaclav Smil's book *Energy Myths & Realities* that he published in 2010, as well as a study out of Harvard in 2018, found the amount of land needed just to meet our existing electricity demand in the United States, which is roughly 4,000 Terawatt-hours a year, would require a land area of roughly twice the size of the state of California.

The scale of the land use required for wind is cartoonish. Yet some of the most prominent academic institutions in America — Cal Berkeley, Stanford, Princeton — are producing reports saying, "Oh, we can do this. All we need is just a few hundred thousand square kilometers of land." Well, these studies don't consider the approximately 290 communities that have already said, "No, we don't want this." There's no mention, no recognition, no acknowledgement of these land use conflicts that are already limiting the growth of wind.

But isn't that just a bunch of empty land?

That question is right on point because all of this worldview depends on this vacant-land myth.

One of the published papers on this looks at South Africa. White settlers would see areas of South Africa that weren't settled and think, "It's vacant." Well, no, actually. Tribal people would migrate through there.

It also happened in the settlement of the western United States: "Oh, well, that land in Oklahoma, or Kansas, or wherever in the west, they're not using it. Well, we're going to use it." This vacant-land myth that now has been around for a very long time also applies to the renewable business that says, "Oh, well, it's degraded land, or it's just farmland, and we're going to help these farmers and give them more income. Oh, and they're going to welcome it." No, it's absolutely wrong.

Don't you have to break a few eggs to make a green new omelet?

Yes, you do. I think the land use issue is the most important, obviously. I've thought about it, talked about it, written about it a lot. But right behind it is material intensity. Where are you going to get all the ingredients, the cobalt, the copper, the steel, the lithium, the neodymium, the praseodymium, the lanthanum?

The problem with low power density sources like biofuels, like wind, like solar, is that to counteract the low power output you have to build more of them, which means high resource intensity.

It's one reason why I'm such a big fan of nuclear. When you have such incredibly dense power, you don't need as much steel, concrete, copper, all these things, to produce huge amounts of energy because of that incredible power density that you get from splitting the atom.

Aren't these rural folks just being ungrateful for the economic development and jobs that people are essentially mandating into their backyards?

This is the argument and the common refrain from the wind developers. I recently spoke to a county commissioner in Nebraska, and I asked him about a project

that was proposed and rejected. He said a salesperson from Invenery, a Chicago-based company, was saying, “Oh, you’re going to miss out on all these benefits and all this tax revenue.”

The county commissioner replied to this guy from Invenery and said, “Mister, you don’t understand these people, they can’t be bought.” He was saying the local farmers were not going to sell leases on their property because they knew it was going to harm their neighbors.

Another example of the divide is wealthy urban interests going into lower-income counties. If you look, and particularly in Minnesota, if memory serves, over 90 percent of all wind projects are in counties that have median household incomes below the state average. This is not a coincidence.

Shifting gears just a little bit, you’ve written about policies like greenhouse gas emission reduction in California among black and Latino leaders. What’s happening in Green California to drive this resistance?

This, to me, is maybe the most interesting politics of any place in the country or in the world. The climate push there from policymakers, elected and non-elected, to reduce CO₂ emissions are so far-reaching in scope — and many of which were never voted on by the legislature — that you’re seeing the backlash from the Latino and black representatives and leaders.

Now, why does that matter? It’s because California has the highest poverty rate of any state when you factor cost of living. The number of people living in poverty in California is roughly equal to the entire population of Arizona.

You have a very wealthy elite class in coastal communities in California where the legislators are powerful, and they’re passing legislation and implementing regulatory regimes that are affecting all Californians, effectively taxing their mobility, taxing their transportation fuel, and taxing the homes they live in.

I interviewed Jennifer Hernandez, a lawyer pressing several lawsuits against the California Air Resources Board (CARB) and she said, “This is racist. This is climate redlining, where the wealthy districts, the wealthy regulators are pass-

ing regulations that have a regressive effect on California’s Latino community, and we’re not going to stand for it.”

What do you think the future of energy holds for the United States and the world? Are we going to figure out the land use issues for wind and solar?

I have a three-part answer.

First, in the wake of the Texas blackouts (at our house in Austin we lost power for 45 hours in subfreezing temperatures on Feb. 15 and 16), there should be a lot more scrutiny of wind and solar and what they can’t do. It’s clear in retrospect that there has been far too much attention paid in California and Texas to decarbonizing the grid and not nearly enough on resilience and reliability.

Second, whatever policy prescriptions come out of Washington, D.C. or state capitals, there’s no denying the fact that energy transitions take decades, not years. In 1985, the U.S. was getting 90 percent of its energy from hydrocarbons. By 2019, despite decades of subsidies and mandates, hydrocarbons still accounted for about 83 percent of the market. Coal may be fading, but oil and natural gas will dominate for many decades to come.

Third, don’t underestimate the left’s eagerness to spend tax dollars on politically popular energy. Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm, in her first major speech, did not use the word “nuclear.” Instead, she said: “We have to add hundreds of gigawatts to the grid over the next four years. It’s a huge amount. And there’s so little time.” It’s clear the Biden administration wants to spend billions more on wind and solar, and the renewable energy lobby is going to take every billion it can get.

Do you think there’s going to be some implosion point with wind and solar?

There is a lot of momentum behind them. But there is also a growing backlash both to the projects themselves and the siting of high-voltage transmission lines. The California and Texas blackouts within a span of six months should be a wakeup call. That said, there’s the old line about investing from John Maynard Keynes: “The market can stay irrational longer than you can stay solvent.” ★

CAPITOL WATCH



This weekly email will deliver:

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- **Inside information** - tips, rumors and analysis that you won't hear anywhere else.
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- **Fun** - quizzes, polls, Golden Turkey nominees, outrageous statements, terrible bill ideas.

≡ ONE YEAR ANNIVERSARY

COVID CONFUSION

BY JOHN PHELAN

An objective look back reveals how the Walz administration **bumbled through its reaction** to the pandemic.



The United States recorded its first case of COVID-19 in Washington state on Jan. 19, 2020. The virus was first detected in Minnesota on March 6. Gov. Tim Walz said then at a press conference: “State and local governments have been working hard for about the last month to prepare, as many in the private sector have. I’m confident Minnesota is prepared for this.”

The data accumulated over the year that followed, however, show that Walz’s confidence was misplaced and his state was mismanaged.

The first ‘lockdown’

Let’s go back to the brink of last spring. Cases continued to mount. On March 13, Walz declared a state of emergency. On March 15, he announced a one-week closure of all Minnesota’s K-12 public schools. On March 16, he closed all non-essential businesses until March 27. And on March 21, the state announced its first COVID-19 death.

By March 25, the Department of Health had recorded 503 cases. Walz directed all Minnesota residents to stay home beginning at 11:59 p.m. on March 27 through 5 p.m. on April 10. The order permitted essential activities and services to continue; for example, with proper social distancing, people were allowed to exercise outdoors and visit grocery stores.

“We’re not going to stop this from spreading... but we can stop how fast it spreads and we can make sure that we protect those most vulnerable,” Walz said. Health officials predicted that about 15 percent of infections would require hospitalization and five percent would need intensive care. If the virus spread too rapidly, Minnesota’s 235 ICU beds would be overwhelmed, people requiring ICU treatment would not get it, and

they would die as a result. The point of staying home, Walz said, was to “flatten the curve,” pushing down the peak of infections by slowing the spread of the virus so that the health system would not be overwhelmed. “The thing that Minnesota is going to do is ensure if you need an ICU, it’s there,” he explained. “Buckle it up for a few more weeks.”

The model

These decisions were driven by forecasts made by a model built over a weekend by the University of Minnesota School of Public Health and state Department of Health. They warned that, without mitigation, COVID-19 could kill upwards of 74,000 Minnesotans and that the state’s ICU beds would be full within six weeks. Even with “vigorous public policy responses,” such as maintaining the stay-at-home order into May and social distancing into June, the model forecast that 22,000 Minnesotans would die from COVID-19 through March 2021.

On April 8, Walz extended his stay-home mandate to May

4 based on Version 2 of the state’s model. This predicted a peak demand for ICU beds of 3,700 on July 13 and, again, 22,000 deaths. “We can say with 95 percent confidence that we are going to need a minimum of 3,000 beds starting in the middle of May. And that could be 3,000 beds as far out as the middle of July, depending on what we do social distancing-wise, and it could go higher,” Walz said. Version 3 of the model, which arrived in May, forecast that Minnesota would see 1,441 COVID-19 deaths by the end of the month.

The actual death toll on May 31 was 1,039, off by 401, or 28 percent.

Over such a small horizon, an error of this significance damns the model that produced it.

These forecasts were wildly off the mark. The actual death toll on May 31 was 1,039, off by 402, or 28 percent.

Over such a small horizon, an error of this significance damns the model that produced it. Version 3 had also forecast a peak ICU demand of 3,397 beds on June 29. Only 85 were COVID-occupied on that date.

The model became such an embarrassing failure that it was quietly abandoned. On Oct. 29, KSTP’s Tom Hauser reported that a new model would show the efficacy of masking and varying degrees of shutdown. Nothing more has been heard of it.

The economy

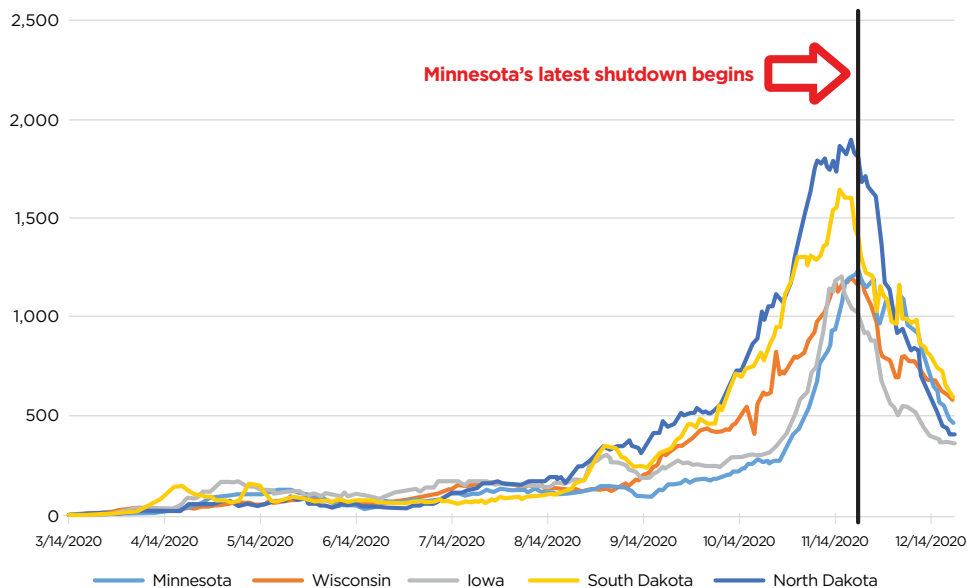
The decisions driven by this model had disastrous economic impacts. In February, 96,111 Minnesotans were unemployed, 3.1 percent of the labor force. Between March 16 and April 14, 409,574 Minnesotans applied for unemployment insurance. The



state's May unemployment rate hit 9.9 percent, its highest since at least 1976.

Some argued that this was a regrettable but necessary price to pay to slow the spread of COVID-19. But it was difficult to discern a pattern in the businesses deemed "essential" and "non-essential." As Dave Orrick of the *Pioneer Press* asked Steve Grove, Minnesota's Commissioner of Employment and Economic Development, on April 29: "I can go into Menards and buy a kite for my kid, but I can't go into Hub Hobby and do the same. If Hub Hobby were open, it would accomplish more for social distancing, no?" Indeed, the general rule seemed to be that the bigger the business, the better its chances of being deemed "essential."

Newly Diagnosed Cases of COVID-19 per Million of the Population, Seven Day Moving Average



Source: The COVID Tracking Project

Care homes

As early as mid-March, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) issued guidelines to slow the spread of the virus for care home residents, which it deemed were at particular risk from COVID-19. "As we learn more about the coronavirus from experts on the ground, we've learned that seniors with multiple conditions are at highest risk for infection and complications," CMS explained.

This was soon borne out in Minnesota. On May 6, it was reported that nearly 84 percent (407) of the state's 485 COVID-19 deaths had been among people living in long-term care facilities, one of the highest percentages in the U.S. The following day, Walz announced a Five-Point Plan to protect care home residents. "Ensuring we are in a strong position to care for our most vulnerable populations is a top priority," he said. "That's why we are implementing a detailed new plan to make sure our long-term care facilities have the support and resources in place to protect residents and workers during this pandemic."

The plan failed. About six months after its launch, care home residents accounted for 69 percent of Minnesota's COVID-19 deaths. True, this was a fall from 84 percent, but the drop was due more to a rapid rise in non-care home deaths than any fall in

care home deaths. Indeed, in the 46 days between March 21 and May 6, the average daily death rate was 8.7 in care homes and 10.3 outside. In the 158 days that followed, the daily death rate outside care homes had surged to 14.6, but the average daily death rate inside care homes had risen too, to 10.1.

The second surge

These failings notwithstanding, on April 29 Walz announced "Mission Accomplished." "I today can comfortably tell you that, when we hit our peak — and it's still projected to be about a month away — if you need an ICU bed and you need a ventilator, you will get it in Minnesota." This was at a time when the state's model was forecasting a peak of 3,700 Minnesotans needing ICU treatment for COVID-19 on July 13. On May 18, with an average of 662 new cases diagnosed in the previous seven days, the stay-at-home order expired, replaced with a "stay safe Minnesota" order. Stay safe simply meant to work from home if you can.

On July 22, with an average of 648 new cases in the previous seven days, Walz mandated that face masks be worn in stores, public buildings and indoor spaces. "If we can get a 90 to 95 percent compliance, which we've seen the science shows, we can reduce the infection rates dramatically, which slows that spread and breaks that chain," he said.

This did not happen. Instead, the number of new cases rose from an average of 591 in the seven days up to and including Sept. 13 to 6,918 in the seven days up to and including Nov. 13. The second surge had arrived. But once again, state leaders were not prepared.

WCCO reported on Nov. 30 that the state was approaching ICU capacity, this when 400 Minnesotans were said to be receiving ICU care for COVID-19. How could this be when, on April



John Phelan is an economist at Center of the American Experiment. He is a graduate of Birkbeck College, University of London, where he earned a BSc in Economics and of the London School of Economics where he earned an MSc.

29, with an expected peak ICU demand of 3,700, Walz had said: “If you need an ICU bed and you need a ventilator, you will get it in Minnesota?” The stay-at-home order had been directed toward building up ICU capacity, from 235 beds to more than 3,000. But the state was now overwhelmed with a demand for 400 beds. If the mask mandate had failed in its stated aim, so, too, had the stay-at-home order.

State government was quick to blame Minnesotans for the failure of its policies. On Jan. 5, Kris Ehresmann, the Minnesota Department of Health’s director of infectious disease epidemiology, prevention and control, told MPR: “What has surprised us the most, is the lack of cooperation from the public.” In fact, data showed that Minnesotans had been complying. Carnegie Mellon University’s COVIDcast Real-time COVID-19 Indicators showed that, as of Nov. 30, 94.74 percent of Minnesotans were reported to be wearing masks most or all of the time while in public. Indeed, this was one explanation given for the near disappearance of seasonal flu — that the measures taken to slow the spread of COVID-19 had wiped out the flu. But clearly, for this to be the case, Minnesotans would have to have been complying with these measures. After so much sacrifice, Minnesotans did not deserve to be thrown under the bus by a state government trying to excuse its policy failures.

To cover for these failures, Walz announced new restrictions effective Nov. 20. However, for all his repeated invocations of “the science” and “the data,” neither supported these new measures. With fears of a post-Thanksgiving surge, the size of indoor and outdoor private gatherings was limited to just 10 people and from no more than three households. Referring specifically to these measures, Ashleigh Tuite, an infectious disease modeler at the University of Toronto, called them unscientific and “bizarre.” Cinemas were closed, despite the fact that, as Dr. Peter Chin-Hong, an infectious disease specialist at the University of California–San Francisco said, there are “no documented COVID cases linked to movie attendance to date globally.” Gyms were closed, despite being linked to just 0.3 percent of Minnesota’s COVID-19 cases. Bars and restaurants were closed once again, despite being linked with just 1.7 percent of COVID-19 cases diagnosed since June 10.

Walz waffled when questioned on this. “I think this really does come down to, like so much of it, it’s not numbers, it’s not data...um...it’s neighborliness, and it’s about we’re all in this together,” he said. Things were no clearer three months on. When asked on Feb. 11 to outline the metrics he was using to make his decisions, he couldn’t answer. “If it was as easy as saying, if this hits this, we automatically do it — it’s a combination of things,” he said.

The second surge began to ebb. For the seven days up to and including Jan. 4, an average of 1,841 new cases were diagnosed daily, down from the peak of Nov. 13 — seven days before the shutdowns went into effect.

This fact didn’t stop state government officials from taking credit for the declining numbers. “We’ve seen the impact of the dial-back process and policies that the governor put in place and Minnesotans have worked hard to follow and make good decisions,” said Health Commissioner Jan Malcolm, the day before Ehresmann chided Minnesotans for their lack of obedience. She added that the second shutdown “clearly helped to change the pandemic’s trajectory this fall and safe lives.”

But apart from the timing, there was other evidence to suggest that Walz’s policies had little impact on the course of COVID-19: the record in Minnesota’s neighbors. Their patterns matched ours. As the chart shows, there is a marked upward surge in the rate of new cases between mid-August and mid-September, peaking in mid-November, before falling away rapidly thereafter.

This is despite the various policies pursued by these states. On mask mandates, for example, Minnesota has had one in place since July 25, Wisconsin since Aug. 1, North Dakota since Nov. 14, Iowa since Nov. 17, and South Dakota not at all. On shutdowns, *The New York Times* noted that businesses were “mostly open” in all of Minnesota’s neighbors with our state the only one of the five where they are “mostly closed.” Yet the patterns are the same. Is all this just incredible coincidence? Was Walz’s second shutdown such a potent weapon that it reduced COVID-19 numbers in neighboring states

too? Or is there some other factor at work?

Walz’s state of emergency, one year later

March 13 was the first anniversary of Walz assuming emergency powers to govern Minnesota by diktat. March 25 commemorates him telling us to “buckle it up for a few more weeks.”

Walz shut down the state to slow the spread of COVID-19 and build up ICU capacity. But when the peak hit, that ICU capacity was nowhere to be found. He initiated a Five-Point Plan for care homes, but care home deaths increased. He imposed a mask mandate to choke off COVID-19, followed, four months later, by the peak of the pandemic.

There is a lot of counting during a crisis like this — deaths, ICU beds and an unfathomable number of hours being locked in our homes, among others. But more than those statistics, the data prove something bigger, something more ominous. During a calamity, you can’t count on Tim Walz. ★

**Kris Ehresmann,
Department of
Health, blamed
Minnesotans for
the state’s failed
policies: “What
has surprised us the
most, is the lack of
cooperation from
the public.”**



ECONOMY

BY MARTHA NJOLOMOLE AND JOHN PHELAN

ECONOMIC ILLUSION

At first glance, Minnesota's economy seems strong. But a closer look at the data shows we're on an unsustainable path.



This is an excerpt from a longer paper, available at [AmericanExperiment.org](https://www.AmericanExperiment.org)

The mythical Greek hunter Narcissus — whose name birthed narcissism — rejected romance because he was so in love with his own beauty, and his self-infatuation hastened his death. He drowned after diving into a pond, chasing his own reflection.

This mirage is reminiscent of the Minnesota economy. Pundits and policymakers who applaud its topline

Minnesota is overreliant on increases in transfer payments for its per capita income growth. A good example of this is welfare. Whenever the state writes one of these checks, it's making a transfer payment.

performance are blindly beholden to an illusion if they don't analyze some underlying challenges that threaten our historic prosperity.

Minnesota's economy today

Perhaps the best place to start is per capita income. High levels of it, fueled by economic growth, enable individuals to afford a more comfortable lifestyle.

In 2019, Minnesota ranked 15th among the states and the District of Columbia on per capita GDP. At \$68,050, it was 4.2 percent higher than the U.S. average of \$65,298. But Minnesota ranked 22nd in per capita GDP growth. Between 2000 and 2019, per capita GDP grew by 20.6 percent in real, inflation-adjusted terms compared to the national average of 25.0 percent.

Even our state's economic hub, the Minneapolis-St. Paul Metropolitan Sta-

tistical Area (MSA), fared badly compared with its competitors elsewhere in the country (Figure 1).

The situation is the same when it comes to per capita personal income — money people earn for their economic activity. This includes wages, benefits, dividend, interest and rent, as well as transfer payments like Social Security and veterans' benefits.

In 2019, Minnesota had the 14th highest per capita personal income among the states and the District of Columbia. But for growth between 2000 and 2019, Minnesota ranked 30th.

The story darkens when we look at the source of this growth. Generally, compared to other states and the country overall, Minnesota is overreliant on increases in transfer payments for its per capita income growth. This is largely due to Minnesota's higher-than-average hike in transfer payment income. A good example of this is welfare. Whenever the state writes one of these checks, it's making a transfer payment.

Between 2000 and 2019, transfer income rose by 81.8 percent in Minnesota. This is well above the U.S. growth rate — 66.4 percent — and ranked

ninth highest among the states and D.C. Income from labor (wages) and capital (dividends, rent and interest), however, grew by 15 percent — 29th highest — compared to the nation's 18 percent.

Accordingly, increases in transfer income accounted for 39.5 percent of the growth in Minnesota's per capita personal income, compared to 34.6 percent for the United States as a whole. It all adds up to seeing something pretty on the surface, the same way Narcissus did with his image on the water.

Per capita income growth sources

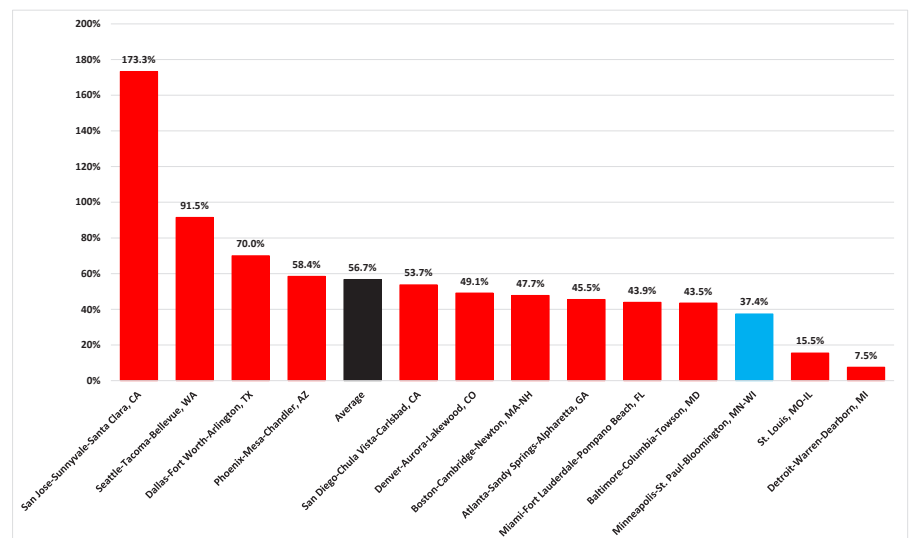
Three factors fuel Minnesota's per capita income growth: an increase in the amount of labor provided by a given population (a higher employment rate/ratio or hours worked); growth of capital per worker (tools workers use); and total factor productivity (efficiency of converting production into output).

The latter is also known as technology (how production inputs become output).

Increased labor

With a given population, we can generate more output if a higher share of it

Figure 1: Real Gross Domestic Growth by Metropolitan Statistical Area, 2001-2019



Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis

(the employment ratio) is employed and producing. Also, this workforce could work longer hours. Both would boost output per capita by increasing GDP without adding more people to the mix.

To visualize this, imagine we have an economy for which the only output is ditch digging. If our town has a population of one and he produces one ditch per year with his bare hands, our output is one ditch per capita. If we add another worker, total output rises to two ditches but we're still at one ditch per capita. Now a third person moves to town, only he doesn't work. Our output remains at two ditches but our per capita production falls to 0.67 ditches.

Minnesota does a lot more than digging ditches, of course, and on the surface the state seems sound. For 2019's employment ratio, Minnesota ranked third in the nation — 67.8 percent of its population was employed compared to the national average of 60.8 percent.

Again, these are just surface statistics. For one, Minnesota's employment ratio has declined. Between 2000 and 2019, labor force participation fell by 4.8 percentage points — the 18th highest rate nationally and above the U.S. average of 3.7 percentage points.

Furthermore, this drop centered on prime working individuals. Between 2000 and 2019, Minnesota saw a slide in the employment ratio of all workers under 55, except for women aged 25 to 34. In contrast, the employment ratio increased for all workers over 55.

Compared to the country, Minnesota has also experienced declining employment of workers aged 16 to 19, as well as black/African American workers. Minnesotans also worked fewer hours per week — 33.7 in 2019 — compared to the national average of 34.3, likely the result of our higher-than-average share of part-time employment.

Those numbers bode poorly when you consider there are limits to how much we can increase labor to boost per capita income. We can potentially reach a point in which almost everyone is employed, with no room for growth.

Minnesota is much closer to this ceiling than most states, because a higher percentage of Minnesotans are employed. At the same time, we have only 24 hours in a day, a finite window for more work and, in turn, output.

In the long run, increasing productivity — the amount each worker can produce, given time worked and level of skill — is the more viable way to achieve sustained income growth. With productivity, we look at two things: (1) GDP produced per worker; and (2) GDP produced per hour worked. On both measures, Minnesota ranks low.

In 2019, the average worker in Minnesota produced a GDP of \$127,968. This is 6.2 percent lower than the nation's \$136,417 and ranked 21st highest among the states and D.C. In 2019, Minnesota produced \$75.95 GDP per hour worked, 4.3 percent less than the national average of \$79.39.

Growth in productivity for Minnesota also lagged behind the national average between 2000 and 2019. While GDP per worker increased by 25.1 percent for the U.S., Minnesota's GDP per worker grew at 21.8 percent. Similarly, GDP per hour for the nation grew at 13.9 percent while Minnesota's grew at 10.5 percent.

One way to blunt this decline is to add more capital per employee. This investment boosts productivity per capita, taking into account the skill level and labor hours of each worker. The trick is to make sure you get a good return.

Take our ditch diggers. Let's say we give each one a shovel. This allows them to dig 10 ditches per year instead of just one. Now let's say we give them two shovels, thinking this will mean 20 ditches per year. Wrong. Workers can't use both of them simultaneously, meaning we invested money into our operation without producing more ditches. Those are diminishing returns.

Turning to Minnesota, the state's capital per worker was \$151,489 in 2019. This was 12.5 percent less than the capital available to every American worker — \$173,122 — and ranked 20th out of the 50 states and D.C. When we account for outliers like Wyoming, North Dakota and Alaska — states that rely heavily on capital-intensive industries such as oil, mining and gas — Minnesota looked better, with capital per worker almost matching the U.S. median average of \$151,861.

Minnesota even improved. Between 2000 and 2019, capital per worker grew by 29.8 percent in our state, higher than the U.S. average of 26.5 percent. But, as with labor, there are limits to usefully increasing capital per worker.

Increased human capital

Remember, giving one worker two shovels doesn't double his output. Sustained per capita income growth needs sources without such constraints.

One source is better skills, often through training and schooling. As a result, productive capacity climbs. There is no ceiling here, theoretically at least, because there's no limit to the knowledge or skill each worker can possess. It's just tough to quantify human capital.

Some researchers use years of schooling as a proxy for "educational attain-

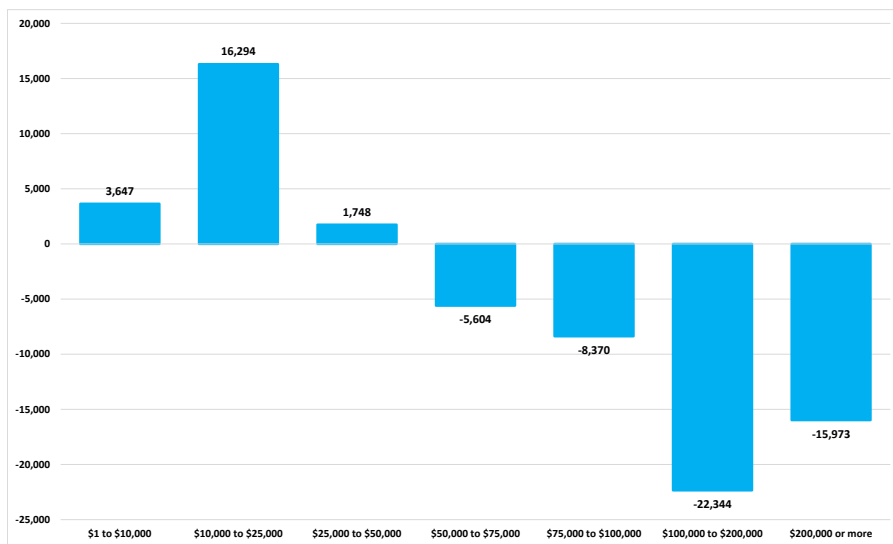


Martha Njolomole is an economist at Center of the American Experiment. She earned a Master of Arts in economics at Troy University in Alabama. Martha's upbringing in Malawi, a developing country, helped her develop a passion for contributing to research on the social and economic advancement of economically disadvantaged people.



John Phelan is an economist at Center of the American Experiment. He is a graduate of Birkbeck College, University of London, where he earned a BSc in Economics and of the London School of Economics where he earned an MSc.

Figure 2: Net Flow of Taxpayers and Dependents to Minnesota by Income of Primary Taxpayers, 2011-2018



Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis

ment.” The problem is, schooling is an input and does not necessarily reflect any specific skills acquired. In other words, a Harvard degree is more vanity than efficacy — more Narcissus than Paul Bunyan — if it doesn’t translate to productivity in the economy.

Some studies have improved upon these measures by augmenting educational attainment with qualitative measures like test scores. On these measures, Minnesota is outstanding. In a 2017 study published in the *American Economic Journal*, Minnesota ranked third nationally for the aggregate per worker knowledge capital, or job skills, of its residents educated in the state.

But there are a couple of problems here. First, the downward trend in employment ratio means Minnesota is moving toward a labor force that will lack skilled employees. And second, this underlying issue is exacerbated when you factor the training of future workers, which starts with schooling, is trending in the wrong direction as well.

The measure of quality used here is dependent on test scores from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), and students from varying socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds tend to perform differently regardless of state. Minnesota does well on average, likely due to its socioeconomic makeup instead of great achievement by

its education system. Indeed, when we disaggregate the data to take these factors into account, Minnesota’s NAEP scores slump from fourth to 33rd in the United States, according to the Cato Institute.

Now compare Minnesota with Texas, which serves similar demographics. Minnesota’s black, Hispanic and Asian/Pacific Islander students underperformed their counterparts in the Lone Star State on reading and math NAEP subject tests. Similarly, Minnesota’s black and Hispanic students trailed Mississippi students of the same racial backgrounds in both fourth-grade and eighth-grade math and reading. Minnesota also does a poor job educating low-income students, compared to Mississippi.

That means Minnesota must rely more on attracting highly skilled workers or retaining the ones here now. Sadly, the state does the inverse.

Furthermore, these losses are not just the “rich” fleeing the state’s exorbitant tax rates. Between 2011 and 2018, Minnesota saw a net outflow of people who earn at least \$50,000 annually.

Technology

The only way societies can experience sustained economic growth is by developing new ideas. While we might run out of resources, there is no reason to run out of ideas. Human ingenuity is, as the economist Julian Simon called it,

“The Ultimate Resource.”

This source of growth is commonly known as technology or total factor productivity. Technology/TFP usually involves finding new and more productive uses of our resources, or developing new processes such as Sam Walton’s approach to retailing, or Henry Ford’s use of assembly lines to turn out a Model T every 24 seconds. Broadly speaking, these ideas fall into two categories: innovation and entrepreneurship.

By one measure, Minnesota is one of the most innovative states in America. In 2019, the state generated 874 patents per million of the population, ranking sixth and well above the U.S. average of 567. But our low GDP per capita growth suggests we’re great at generating new ideas while other states are better at applying them and reaping the benefits.

Minnesota also fares relatively poorly on entrepreneurship. In 2020, new/young businesses — those which are five years old or less — accounted for just 31.3 percent of all commerce in our state, 38th in the U.S. Nationally, the figure was 37.7 percent.

What’s worse, between 2000 and 2020, new/young businesses fell by 4.6 percent in Minnesota, more pronounced than the national trend.

The mirage

Minnesotans typically have high incomes relative to residents of other states, but much of this is a legacy of past prosperity. In recent years, per capita income growth has both lagged that of the country and been overly reliant on transfer income. This is unsustainable.

Given the limitations of labor and capital, a continual rise in per capita incomes requires more labor productivity, and there are three ways to achieve this.

1. Reverse declining education data.
2. Enact policies that attract and retain highly skilled workers.
3. Foster more entrepreneurship.

Cutting tax rates and providing more school choice would be a great start. Otherwise, we’re doomed to remain enamored with the shiny economy of today, a prelude to our very own Narcissus-into-the-water moment. And in the Land of 10,000 Lakes, there are a lot of ways to drown. ★

A close-up photograph of a flashlight beam illuminating a wooden surface. The beam is bright and focused, creating a strong contrast with the dark background. The flashlight's body is visible in the upper right corner, and the beam extends across the middle of the frame.

≡ ENERGY

BLACK OUT

Isaac Orr
and Mitch Rolling

What Minnesotans can learn from rolling blackouts and government favoritism for wind and solar.

In mid-February, more than 4.5 million families in Texas suffered through a week of rolling power outages due to inadequate electricity supplies.

Rolling power outages also affected millions in the Southwest Power Pool (SPP), a regional electric grid that contains portions of 14 states spanning from North Dakota to New Mexico, including small portions of Minnesota.

The effect these blackouts had on the lives of residents of these states ranged from inconvenient to deadly.

As of Feb. 21, more than 40 people in Texas had died from the power outage, according to ABC News. At least five people had died of carbon monoxide poisoning by trying to keep warm us-

ing grills or running cars inside closed garages — two of them were a mother and child.

Another tragedy involved an 11-year-old boy named Cristian Pineda. He died of hypothermia after his family's mobile home lost power and heat for two days during the freezing weather. His death is heartbreaking, and it was unnecessary.

The human cost of the blackouts goes far beyond the number of people who passed away. Millions of people woke up without access to safe drinking water — 14 million, to be exact. Multiple days of below-freezing temperatures caused water pipes to burst, resulting in flooding in many homes and businesses. Broken systems also left millions without any

water at all.

Blackouts are also devastating economically. In Texas, insurance adjusters believe the deep freeze could cause \$18 billion in damages, and result in more insurance claims than any previous weather event in the history of Texas. More than Hurricanes Harvey, Ike, or Rita.

These insurance claims don't even begin to consider the enormous \$7,000 to \$17,000 electric bills some families in Texas are receiving, or the lost productivity in the Texas economy that was exacerbated by the blackouts.

The news from Texas and other states left many people wondering: What caused the blackouts and how can we make sure they never happen in Minnesota?

What the hell happened in Texas?

The most obvious reason for the blackouts in Texas is there was not enough electricity supply on the grid to meet demand.

Demand surged on Feb. 15 as freezing temperatures enveloped the state. Unlike Minnesota, where roughly 66 percent of households heat their homes with natural gas and only 17 percent use electricity, Texans rely on electricity for 61 percent of their home heating and 35 percent use natural gas.

The most important thing to know about the electricity system is that the supply of electricity must always match demand within a very narrow band of frequency.

It's a little like the process of turning the dial on an FM radio, for those who remember them, to get the clearest signal. Turning the dial too far in either direction causes the sound to get fuzzy, turn it even further and the channel is changed entirely.

In the United States, the electric grid operates at a frequency of 60 Hertz. If the demand for electricity on the grid outstrips supply, it causes the frequency to dip. As the frequency dips, the power plant equipment that is designed to operate at a specific threshold can sustain permanent physical damage that would make blackouts even worse.

To prevent this damage, power plants have built-in safety mechanisms that cause them to “trip” offline or disconnect from the grid. Unfortunately, “each generating plant that goes offline to avoid damage puts more stress on those that remain, causing them to go offline one at a time,” according to Bloomberg. These factors led to an accelerating cascade of outages.

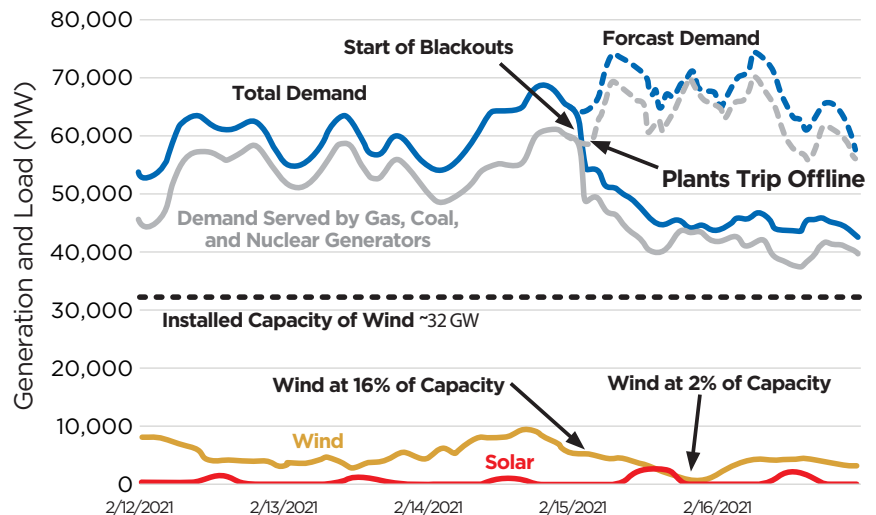
Unmet demand

Cold temperatures led to a surge in demand for electricity, but this need was not met for a multitude of reasons.

One reason is that the natural gas production system in Texas is not designed to operate in such frigid temperatures. According to *The Texas Tribune*, natural gas production fell from 24 billion cubic feet per day to between 12 and 17 billion.

Falling production reduced the amount of gas available for power plants, and there were multiple instances where natural gas supplies were diverted away from power plants to be used for heating at homes, businesses and hospitals. Lastly, falling wind speeds led to a significant drop-off in electricity production from the Texas wind fleet. At some points during the Polar Vortex, wind

Energy Supply and Demand During the Texas Energy Crisis



SOURCE: Life:Powered, Texas Public Policy Foundation

was producing just two percent of its potential output.

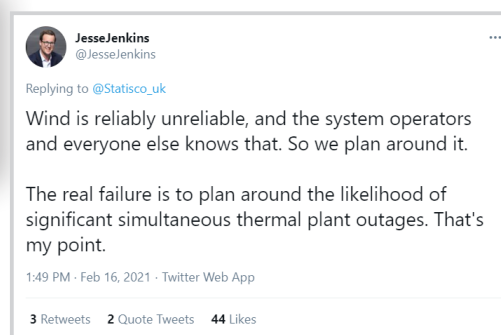
This confluence of factors led the frequency on the grid to fall below the stable threshold for operation, causing some natural gas and coal-fired power plants to trip offline, making the blackouts worse than they needed to be.

The Electric Reliability Council of Texas (ERCOT), which operates most of the state grid, estimates 30 gigawatts of natural gas, coal and nuclear capacity were offline during the worst part of the blackouts, constituting half of the reliable capacity Texas expected to be available during the periods of highest demand in the winter months.

Blame game

As what happens in any crisis, fingers were quickly pointed. Many conservatives, us included, were quick to highlight plummeting wind production as evidence that unreliable energy sources often fail when they are needed most.

Wind and solar advocates quickly took to their battle stations to deflect blame away from wind's disappearing act. Dr. Jesse Jenkins, a professor at Princeton University and a rising star in the world of renewable energy, took to Twitter saying, “Wind is reliably unreliable, and the system operators and everyone else knows that. So we plan around it. The real failure is to plan around the likelihood



of simultaneous thermal plant outages. That's my point."

The "Don't blame us, you should already know we rarely work when you need us!" argument is terrible. It's a damning condemnation of wind technology.

Can you imagine a car company staying in business if they sold vehicles whose seat belts only worked in two percent of car crashes? Would it make you feel any safer buckling your kids into their car seat *knowing* the seat belt was unreliable? Of course not. There would be class action lawsuits and angry parents demanding answers to the most important question: Why didn't your product work when I needed it most?

Jenkins isn't entirely wrong, though. Natural gas shortages were a major problem in Texas. Had more natural gas been available to homes and power plants, fewer people would have gone without power and the blackouts would not have been nearly as devastating. However, this fundamental truth remains: You can winterize a pipeline network, but you can't make the wind blow.

Blackouts inevitable

We wrote "fewer people" would have gone without power with natural gas winterization instead of "no one" because an analysis from Dr. Brent Bennett of the Life:Powered initiative from the Texas Public Policy Foundation

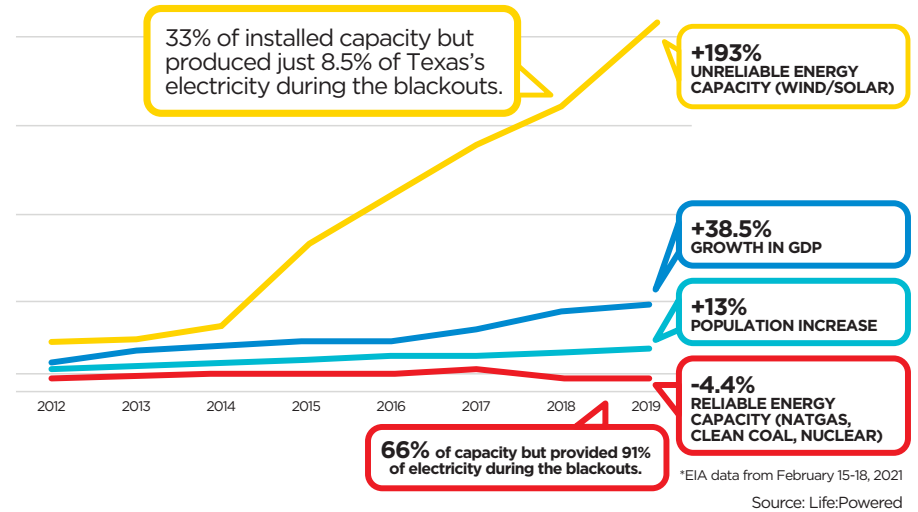


Isaac Orr is a policy fellow at Center of the American Experiment where he writes about energy and environmental issues, including mining and electricity policy.



Mitch Rolling is a policy analyst at Center of the American Experiment on energy and environmental issues.

Growing Unreliable Electricity Capacity



(TPPF) argues that the blackouts were likely inevitable.

TPPF's president, Chuck DeVore, wrote in Fox News that blackouts would have occurred even if every single natural gas, coal and nuclear generator had operated at full output.

According to Bennett, electricity demand in Texas has grown at a rate of about two percent annually over the past decade, requiring a comparable growth in generation to meet that demand. However, this growing demand was not met with a corresponding increase in the number of reliable natural gas, coal or nuclear power plants on the

Texas grid — it was met by wind and solar.

In the past five years, Texas saw an increase of about 20,000 megawatts of installed wind and solar capacity, but it also experienced a net loss of 4,000 MW of natural gas and coal-fired powerplants, wrote DeVore. This means increasing demand was met with a decrease in reliable supply compared to 2015 values. The results were devastating.

Even after assuming no outages at the coal, natural gas or nuclear plants operating earlier in the week, and twice the actual output from wind (to approximate generation if half the fleet had not iced over), periodic blackouts were inevitable.

Where were the reliable generators?

It is scary to learn that there were never going to be enough reliable power plants on the grid to handle the surge in demand over Valentine's Day weekend. This leads us to ask, why has Texas built so many wind and solar facilities since 2015 and closed down much-needed reliable power plants? The answer lies with the design of Texas's wholesale electricity market.

Wind, solar and wholesale electricity markets

Minnesotans are familiar with retail electricity prices because these are the prices we pay on our electric bills each month. But before we get the bill, electricity is bought and sold on a wholesale market using an arcane auction system, and it's rigged in favor of wind and solar at the expense of reliable power plants.

In Texas, the game is even more manipulated to favor unreliable energy sources, leading to the closure of reliable power plants and exacerbating the blackouts. In fact, a 2018 report from the Wind Solar Alliance of Texas bragged about this very outcome.

Unlike Minnesota, Texas does not require utilities to make sure there are always enough reliable power plants online to meet electricity demand when the wind isn't blowing or the sun isn't

shining. Instead, the Texas market pays the same amount to all electricity generators regardless of whether those power plants can be called upon to generate power when needed.

This is a massive mistake, because federal subsidies have encouraged an enormous buildout of wind turbines in Texas, and because wind and solar have no fuel costs, they are always allowed to sell power into the auction if the sun is shining or the wind is blowing. Such factors have allowed these energy facilities to “dump” power into wholesale markets, driving down the prices and pushing reliable coal and natural gas generators out of business.

The most important thing to know about the electricity system is that the supply of electricity must always match demand within a very narrow band of frequency.

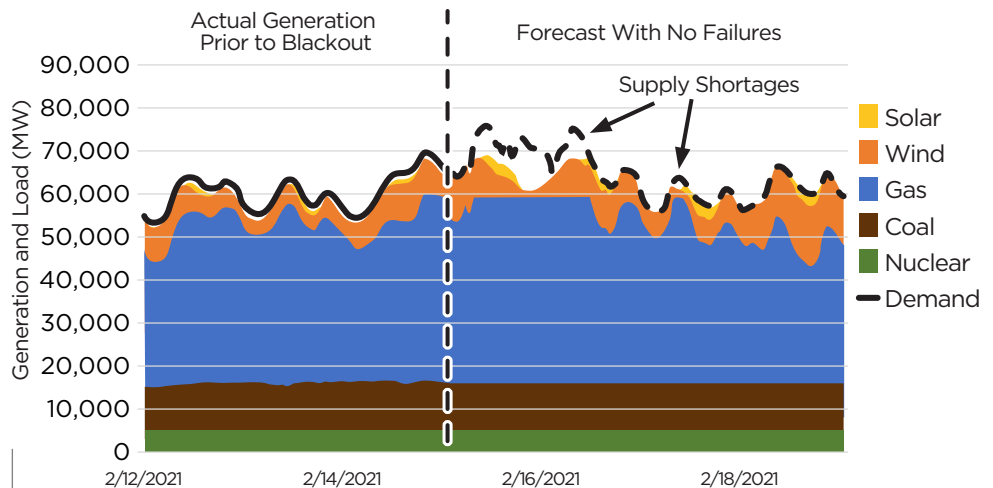
Artificially low wholesale power prices produce no incentive to build reliable power plants, and as a result, there was not enough capacity on the Texas grid when electricity was needed most.

In this way, wind and solar have a similar effect on wholesale power markets as did Chinese steel firms when they were allowed to dump product into the U.S. to drive down domestic production.

What lessons can Minnesota learn?

While Texas and 14 states in the SPP were suffering from rolling blackouts, the regional grid to which most of Minnesota belongs, the Midcontinent Independent System Operator (MISO), was able to keep the lights on because it has a large fleet of coal-fired power plants to lean on when times are tough.

Inevitable Blackouts



SOURCE: LifePowered, Texas Public Policy Foundation

According to Feb. 15 data on the MISO website, coal produced 52 percent of the electricity consumed on that day. Natural gas provided 28 percent and nuclear 12 percent. During this time, wind produced just 4.2 percent of demand, and solar only 0.3 percent.

What’s worse, wind provided only 3,521 MW of electricity, even though it could have produced 22,000 MW. This means wind produced just 16 percent of its potential output when we needed the electricity most.

Over the course of the week, it was the coal, natural gas and nuclear plants that carried the electric load while wind and solar were occasional contributors.

Unfortunately, the coal plants won’t be around to carry the load much longer. Xcel Energy, Minnesota Power and Great River Energy have announced their plans to shutter these reliable power plants and build wind, solar and natural gas.

This is a very bad idea, because unlike coal or nuclear plants, which can store months’ worth of fuel on site, natural gas relies on just-in-time delivery from pipelines. If natural gas supply is disrupted by problems producing or transporting the gas, it can lead to shortages that result in blackouts or wild price spikes.

Minnesotans will get a small taste of these price spikes this year, as natural gas utilities in the state estimate heating bills will be \$400 higher due to skyrocketing

prices during the polar vortex alone.

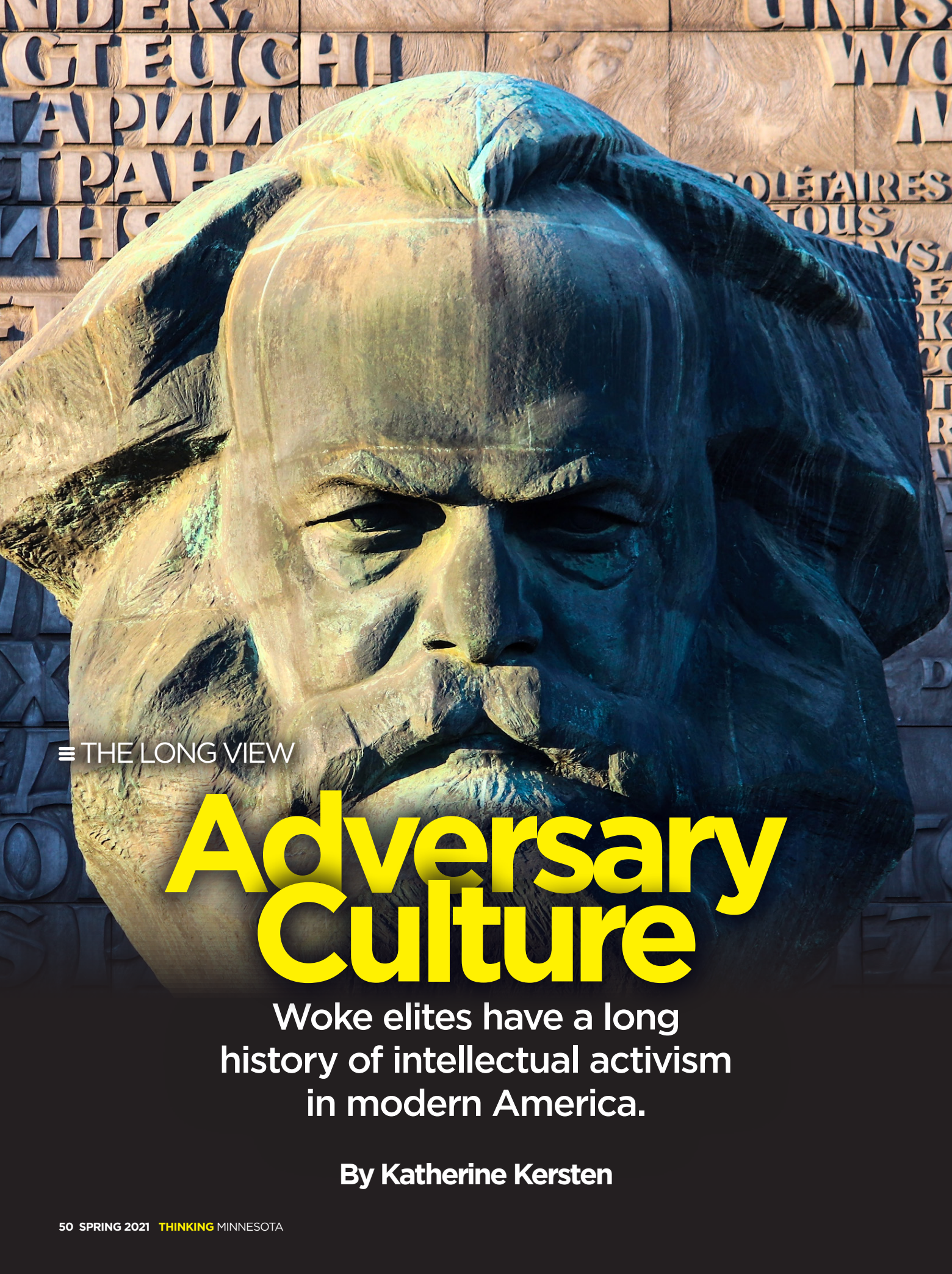
This problem will be much worse when the coal fleet is gone, because it means our electricity system will be extremely reliant upon natural gas when it’s not sunny or windy, putting us at risk of rolling blackouts and huge cost increases as natural gas prices soar.

The graph shows the current grid mix in Minnesota, versus what it will likely look like on a low wind and solar generation day in 2035, when the state’s last coal plant is set to retire.

Natural gas will be expected to more than triple its electricity generation output during these events, and home heating demand will likely soar. The competition for natural gas will harm consumers and leave them more vulnerable to a Texas-sized energy failure.

The best way to make sure the lights stay on in Minnesota is to keep our coal and nuclear fleets running as long as possible. Unlike natural gas systems, these power plants can store months of fuel on site, and they operate regardless of weather conditions.

Gradually replacing our existing coal plants with new nuclear plants would be the best way to ensure reliable, affordable energy in the most environmentally friendly way possible. Taking the same approach as Texas, but expecting different results, will lead to terrible consequences. ★



≡ THE LONG VIEW

Adversary Culture

Woke elites have a long
history of intellectual activism
in modern America.

By Katherine Kersten

The unrest that erupted in late May 2020 started in Minneapolis with the death of George Floyd in police custody.

In the protests and riots that followed, Black Lives Matter and Antifa were the shock troops, “police brutality” the rallying cry. It seemed at first an uprising from below, accompanied by common criminality as stores were looted and businesses torched. But with lightning speed, our nation’s elite — leaders of Ivy League universities, major media outlets, and Fortune 500 corporations — seized on the BLM cause. Over and over they reiterated the claim that Floyd’s death revealed “systemic racism” in America. Mainstream figures pledged solidarity with activist groups bent on the wholesale transformation of our society. They assured us that the protests, the statue-toppling, and even the looting expressed the justifiable demand that we face up to our racial sins.

To accept the claims of the new “woke” movement requires ignoring the extraordinary progress America has made in overcoming the legacy of slavery and Jim Crow. Sixty years after the Civil Rights Act of 1964 — and despite decades of affirmative action, massive social welfare spending, and a two-term black president — the movement’s adherents maintain that our society remains captive to “white supremacy.” Few citizens dare to disagree publicly, which is no surprise. Attacks on dissenters in the press and social media have been ruthless, and some of the targets have lost their reputations and livelihoods.

The elites’ endorsement of BLM radicalism and tacit approval of street violence raise a vexing question: Why are society’s most powerful opinion-makers supporting a revolt against mainstream legal, political, and cultural institutions?

Aren’t these elites themselves, in a real sense, the system? How is it that those so richly rewarded by our society have come to ally themselves with society’s angriest critics?

The concept of the alienated intellectual plays a central role in the analysis of the subversive character of modern literature in the literary critic Lionel Trilling’s 1955 book, *The Opposing Self*.



The elites’ endorsement of BLM radicalism and tacit approval of street violence raise a vexing question: Why are society’s most powerful opinion-makers supporting a revolt against mainstream legal, political, and cultural institutions?

Trilling noted that by the end of the 18th century, the moral imagination of the West (at least among those at the top, who wrote and read books) was “intense and adverse.” The prophets of Israel had hardly been complacent — but something different was at work in modernity. “The modern self is characterized by

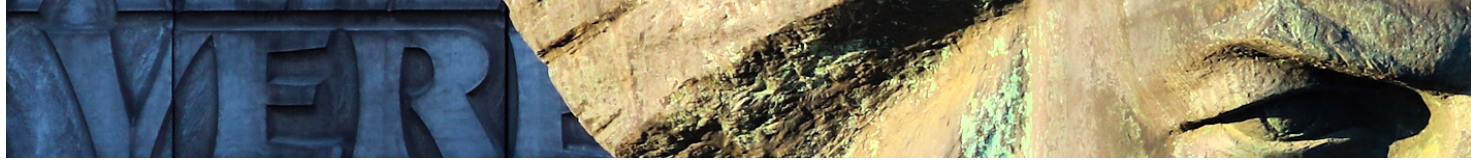
certain powers of indignant perception,” Trilling observed, and this indignation became a general attitude. Trilling gives the example of prisons, images of which proliferate in 19th-century literature. The “prison” is not just a dim stone building with barred windows. In modern literature, “social restrictions and economic disabilities” are pictured as prisons. In Dickens’s *Little Dorrit*, the title character is born in a prison.

In later novels, characters are depicted as trapped in prisons “in the family life, in the professions, in the image of respectability, in the ideas of faith and duty.” Delight, imagination, and fullness of life require escape from these prisons, which is to say escape from what Trilling calls “the general culture.”

We are heirs to the sensibility that gives a prime role to indignation at society’s inevitable failures and conceives of human flourishing as requiring a “jail break”

from social convention. Thus, a person who thinks himself cultivated and critically aware — part of the enlightened crowd — has a sense of personal identity “conceived in opposition to the general culture.” The striking commercial success of *On the Road*, Jack Kerouac’s account of the countercultural “beat” lifestyle, revealed the large audience of university-educated people who were very much part of 1950s “conventionality,” yet who resonated with the oppositional ethos of Kerouac’s misfits.

Trilling expanded his analysis of the alienated intellectual in his 1965 book, *Beyond Culture*. As the 1960s unfolded, he saw that the animus he had earlier identified was becoming politicized. Any literary historian, he observed, will take for granted “the adversary intention, the actually subversive intention, that characterizes modern writing.” Its “clear purpose” is to give the reader “a ground and vantage point from which to judge and condemn, and perhaps revise,



the culture that produced him.”

Trilling made these observations at a time when novels played an important role in forming upper-middle-class sensibilities. He understood that the influence of novels extended far beyond alienated intellectuals. The vast market for literature of “adversary intention” revealed that works of social criticism and literature of alienation and liberation gratified the appetites of those who thrilled to their oppositional stance. Trilling called this growing consensus “the adversary culture.”

John Cheever’s *New Yorker* short stories and novels such as John Updike’s *Rabbit, Run* documented the ennui of suburban respectability. Freudian psychotherapy and related therapeutic approaches fueled the conviction that American society was too “repressive.” Pride at America’s triumph in World War II soured into recrimination and protests against the Vietnam War. Movies such as *A Clockwork Orange* and *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* painted a dark picture of social control. These were among the cultural markers of the extraordinary growth of the oppositional sensibility Trilling had diagnosed. “The more ‘cultivated’ a person is in our society, the more disaffected and malcontent he is likely to be,” observed Irving Kristol. What Trilling wrote in 1965 is still true today: “It is a belief still pre-eminently honored that a primary function of art and thought is to liberate the individual from the tyranny of his culture.” And not just art, but education, entertainment, and even commerce, as woke capitalism illustrates.

I first encountered “Sandalistas” (the nickname given to sandal-wearing progressives who traveled to Nicaragua to support the Sandinistas) in August 1986 at a bread-and-soup supper at a luxury home overlooking Minneapolis’s tony “Lake of the Isles.” The guests were corporate middle

Somoza. Their judgment was part of a larger narrative about the entirely destructive role of American interventions in Central America. America was a force for evil, as they saw it, not good. Yet they rhapsodized about the charismatic Marxist dictator Daniel Ortega and his gun-toting Sandinista National Liberation Front. In their eyes, these Marxist revolutionaries could do no wrong.

My fellow guests glared at me when I asked skeptical questions: What about the Sandinistas’ contempt for human and political rights? What about their attempt to turn the Catholic Church into an arm of the state? No answers came, and I began to suspect the motivations of hosts and their guests went beyond selfless concern for suffering peasants. Many had traveled to Central America on ideological pil-

grimages with organizations such as Witness for Peace. As they recounted their experiences, their eyes lit up and their voices quickened, as if to say, “I once was lost but now am found.”

Their pilgrimages had apparently offered an exhilarating, risk-tinged contrast with their comfortable, predictable lives in America — an adrenaline shot of “authentic” meaning, which stood in contrast to the “conventionality” of the United States. They viewed the Sandinista guerrillas as engaged in a noble fight for social justice and were gratified to participate in it vicariously. Most had returned home radicalized, eager to evangelize benighted friends and neighbors. The message they preached was that Americans must accept the guilt they bore, not just for Nicaraguan suffering, but also for countless failures at home. The way of atonement was to affirm revolutionary social transformation.



“Systemic racism” is an ever-present and all-powerful threat that must be “eradicated,” while the destruction of stores, public buildings, and monuments presents no real moral problem.

managers, pastors, and psychologists — articulate, earnest, and well educated.

I was struck at the time, however, by their moral double standards. They reviled the United States for having supported Nicaraguan strongman Anastasio

Sociologist Paul Hollander came to the United States after escaping from communist Hungary in 1956. Having first-hand experience with a totalitarian regime, he was baffled to encounter American intellectuals who



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were sympathetic to communism and endorsed its revolutionary aims. Some even championed Stalin, Castro, and Mao. Hollander saw that they were captive to an oppositional habit of mind, which led them toward a hypercritical repudiation of our nation's institutions. Worse, this habit of mind led them to misperceive and idealize systems like the one he had fled, while overlooking or denying the virtues of their own society.

In *Political Pilgrims: Travels of Western Intellectuals to the Soviet Union, China and Cuba 1928–1978* (1981) and other writings, Hollander explains why so many of the best-off people in the wealthiest, freest nation in the world have contempt for their own society. Though he died in 2019, before woke crusaders' latest forays, his analysis sheds light on our cultural moment.

Hollander recognized the importance of the adversary culture in postwar America. It is characterized, he wrote,

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by the “socially critical temper” produced by alienation and estrangement from the larger society. Though a vibrant democracy requires vigorous debate, the fierce criticism nurtured by the adversary culture encourages “an intense, radical and indignant” disposition, which generates social-critical passions powerful enough to overwhelm reason. Thus arises the impairment — willed or genuine

— of one's capacity to make important distinctions among degrees of social evil. The tens of millions killed during Mao's Cultural Revolution disappear from view. The result is “an outlook or state of mind which leads to (or entails) viewing one's own society with deep misgivings and suspicion,” condemning it as “deeply flawed, unjust,” and “calculated to constrain or reduce human satisfactions.”

In *Political Pilgrims* and elsewhere, Hollander recounts how this mindset prompted a parade of prominent intellectuals — among them George Bernard Shaw, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Noam Chomsky — to embrace beliefs at odds with reality, shaped by wishful thinking, and distorted by a suspension of logic. Though hyper-sensitive to their own societies' flaws, these commentators gave the benefit of every doubt to systems and ideologies that advanced a utopian egalitarian and humanitarian vision. Reality was of no consequence; they thrilled to ideals.

New York Times reporter Walter Duranty offers a notorious example. In the 1930s, in the face of incontrovertible evidence, Duranty extolled the Soviet Union and denied Stalin's mass starvation of Ukrainian peasants. He was not alone. American writer Joseph Freeman was certain he had seen the future after a visit to the U.S.S.R:

[F]or the first time I saw the greatest of human dreams assuming the shape of reality. Men, women and children were uniting their efforts into a gigantic stream of energy directed toward . . . creating what was healthy and good for all.

Duranty, like other pro-Soviet intellectuals at the time, displayed startling credulity: “[I]t is unthinkable that Stalin . . . and the Court Martial could have sentenced their friends to death unless the proofs of guilt were overwhelming.”

In the 1960s, Castro's Cuba offered susceptible intellectuals a tempting opportunity for uncritical admiration closer to home. Saul Landau, a journalist and human rights activist, called Cuba “the first purposeful society that we have had in the Western Hemisphere for many years.”

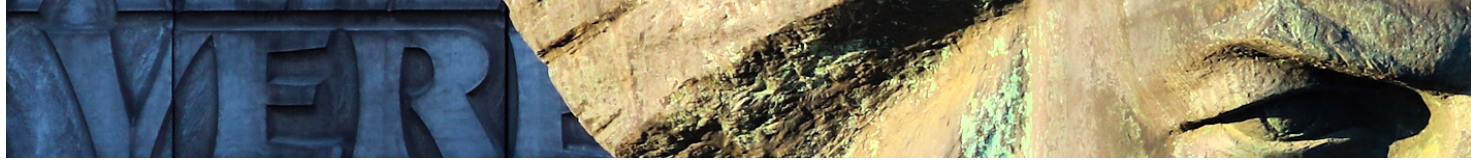
Castro had given birth to a system in which “human beings are treated as human beings, where men have a certain dignity, and where this is guaranteed to them.”

These affirmations had little to do with the needs of Cubans and a great deal to do with the needs of Americans raised in the adversary culture. Todd Gitlin declared, “We look to Cuba not only because of what we sense Cuba to be but because of what the United States is not.” Just as the Soviet Union had been for Duranty the ideal that exposed the moral mediocrity of America, Cuba was the mirror in which many 1960s activists saw America's warts.

Marxist revolutionaries in Central America provoked similar frenzied admiration in the 1970s and '80s. “I came back [from Nicaragua] far more ashamed of my country than at any time since the Vietnam War,” wrote Michael Harrington. “The Nicaraguans,” he insisted, “want to make a truly democratic revolution and it is we who subvert their decency.” Events would prove Harrington wrong. The Sandinistas imposed an authoritarian regime, and over the decades Daniel Ortega would become richer than Anastasio Somoza, the strongman he had replaced. But that never seems to matter. Sustaining the “oppositional self” is more important than admitting to the existence of complex social realities.

When I went to the bread-and-soup dinner to hear about the virtues of the Sandinistas and the vices of American foreign policy, the cohort enamored of Central American revolutionaries was relatively small. But as Trilling observed in the 1960s, over time a nexus of intellectuals, writers, and critics shapes popular culture, which diffuses the oppositional ethos throughout society. Today's “woke” crusade against “systemic racism” includes not only *New York Times* reporters but work-a-day accountants, nurses, and soccer moms. Once universally recognized as radical, the social-critical mindset and its indignant habits of mind have become, one might say, as American as apple pie.

To a great extent, the mainstreaming



of the adversary culture corresponded with the dramatic increase in young people attending college. In 1940, about five percent of high school graduates had a college degree. After World War II, Americans began to flood university campuses. In subsequent decades, millions of university-educated people entered government, education, media, entertainment, the arts, the “helping professions,” and the non-profit sector.

As secularization advanced, intellectuals and other producers and consumers of social criticism took on a new social function. The clergy’s status as moral leaders declined, and public intellectuals, journalists, and news anchors replaced figures such as Bishop Fulton Sheen and Billy Graham as a moralizing elite.

The Vietnam War marked a turning point. The burgeoning cohort of middle-class students who went to the universities had been trained in the adversarial mindset that Trilling identified. Che Guevara posters became a staple of college dorm rooms. In Hollander’s view, the war was the catalyst, not the source, of the ’60s revolution because it “tapped into already deep wells of latent social disaffection.” Activists of the era gave evidence that he was right. “If there had been no Vietnam, we [radicals] would have invented one,” said Jerry Rubin. “If the Vietnam War ends, we will find another war.” The particular moral issues at stake in the Vietnam conflict were not decisive. What mattered to Rubin was that the war symbolized the evil of the American “system.”

After graduation, many critically disposed students became teachers, professionals, and government bureaucrats. In 1976, Peter Berger noted: “Many of the radical impulses of 10 years ago have now become firmly institutionalized.” The oppositional mentality had become so pervasive as to trigger “a far-reaching delegitimation of some of the key institutions and values of American society.”

There were no doubt good reasons to criticize American society. Given our fallen condition, there are always flaws in our institutions, sometimes grievous flaws. But it is striking that those who

have tenure at elite universities, run foundations that award fellowships to artists, staff government bureaucracies, and control our media speak of themselves as “countercultural” when, in truth, they are at the center of contemporary culture-making. This is a central feature of the adversary culture: It sustains the “oppositional self,” which feeds on critical denunciation of the status quo.

Today, the hyper-critical mindset is so widespread that it has become, as Hollander described it, “a diffuse sensibility, a predisposition rather than a clearly thought-out ideological or philosophical position.” For people socialized into it, this mindset amounts to a new form of conventional wisdom: “instinctive, intuitive, non-intellectual — as all profoundly held cultural (or subcultural) beliefs are.” Thus our odd situation: Mayors, college presidents, corporate leaders, and media titans express paradoxically conventional and “establishment” affirmations of revolutionary causes.

Hollander recognized that political commitments often spring from deeper, unarticulated, non-political sources. In his words, “predisposition influences perception.” The moralistic crusades undertaken by people whose positions in life put them at a great distance from the issues they claim to care about are often not so much about a search for justice as a working out of their personal needs and dissatisfactions.

Hollander traces the rise of the adversary culture to the discontents generated by modern life — most especially, secularization. The alienation of contemporary intellectuals, in his view, is a response to the frustration and emptiness created by the lack of meaning and purpose in modern, materialist society. The postwar universities tended to reject traditional Judeo-Christian sources of meaning. But in the absence of religion, what can explain sin and guilt? The fault must reside in society. This projection of sin onto society allows the oppositional self to find meaning. He will maintain his purity by maintaining his adversarial stance. And he will find meaning in life

by crusading against America’s sins.

This moralistic and crusading dynamic takes place against the backdrop of American cultural history, with its strong strains of utopianism and powerful romantic elements. American individualism is marked by an optimistic view of the individual’s potential for self-realization, and a conviction that evil social institutions needlessly constrain our best impulses. This mindset can easily evolve into indignation about all restraints, as Trilling recognized. It can link individual liberation to a radical transformation of society that promises to abolish all restrictive categories. Transgender ideology is the most obvious example.

In today’s morally relativistic world, identity is no longer tied — as in the Judeo-Christian tradition — to the development of personal character through the cultivation of courage, prudence, self-control, and other virtues. Instead, intellectuals believe they can choose their identities. Often, they are drawn to the gratifying identity of the “social justice warrior,” which requires merely the adoption of “advanced” opinions. With the adept use of pronouns and the right profile on social media, today’s oppositional self distances himself or herself from society’s sins.

Marxist-influenced thought has an important appeal in this context. As Hollander observes, Marxism’s ideological framework offers a “seemingly scientific foundation” for organizing moral passion and guides intellectuals in identifying “just” causes. Marxist ideology’s depiction of life as a power struggle between oppressors and victims — a core tenet of today’s “woke” movement — can serve to justify an unrelenting, self-righteous denunciation of the inevitable gap between aspirational American principles and real-world outcomes.

The upshot is a paradox very much evident today. The adversary culture alternates between moral absolutism and moral relativism — swinging from virulent criticism of “oppressor” groups to passionate enthusiasm for putative victims and their self-described champions, at home or abroad. “Systemic racism” is an

ever-present and all-powerful threat that must be “eradicated,” while the destruction of stores, public buildings, and monuments presents no real moral problem. Policemen who make bad decisions in high-stress situations while doing their jobs are subject to searching, hostile criticism, and sometimes prosecution, while local prosecutors refuse to press charges against Antifa protestors who hurl bricks and assault police.

In recent months, COVID-19 has shifted the adversary culture’s energies into high gear. Virus-related lockdowns have unleashed restless energy. Since George Floyd’s death, young people socialized into the adversary mindset have thronged the streets for protests and riots. These youngsters belong to a generation notoriously lacking in meaning and purpose. They long to be part of something bigger than themselves. At the same time, older Americans — stuck at home — have reacted to the pandemic like Old Testament figures in times of plague. They manifest a millenarian readiness to assume guilt for society’s racial sins by donning sackcloth and sitting in the ashes.

This dynamic is especially evident in Minneapolis. The ostensible goal of the protests, riots, and policy changes has been to end racism and build an “equitable” society. But evidence suggests that the real driver is the hallmark of the adversary culture: a reflexive animus against the American system, whose institutions are viewed as oppressive. The Minneapolis City Council has labeled white racism a “public health emergency,” with one council member calling it the “disease” that underlies “all the racially inequitable results we are living with today.” Yet, as Hollander warns, the council members’ simplistic view of life as a power struggle between oppressors and victims, whites and blacks, blinds them to complex social realities, including black family fragmentation and black-on-black violence. These must be addressed if the racial outcomes the council deplors are to change.



Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey has designated “systemic racism” one of “the greatest long-term threats” the city faces.

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Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey has designated “systemic racism” one of “the greatest long-term threats” the city faces. Yet he is unable to identify a single public official or process that can objectively qualify as racist. Liberal Democrats have governed Minneapolis for almost 50 years, and racial “equity” has been a centerpiece of their agenda. Frey’s “willful amnesia” — so characteristic of the adversary culture — sustains the need to remain “oppositional.” It also masks how profoundly the adversary culture has failed. It relieves our civic leaders of responsibility for their own leadership, which over the last 50 years has created serious problems for black Americans and others who don’t live in the upscale neighborhoods where BLM signs are on prominent display.

The Minneapolis City Council has accused the city’s police department of institutional racism and voted to defund it (though police defunding was not on the ballot in the 2020 election and the council’s vote will not set policy going forward). Not surprisingly, homicides and shootings — nearly all black-on-black — have risen dramatically. At the

same time, elected officials have stood by as rioters and arsonists have vandalized, looted, or destroyed at least 1,500 businesses, many minority- or immigrant-owned, with the damage estimated at \$500 million or more. At one point, Mayor Frey characterized the rioters’ “anger and sadness” as “not only understandable, [but] right.”

As if to vindicate Trilling and Hollander, amid the destruction, a new, quasi-religious source of meaning has sprung up. In a city where many churches remain closed in response to COVID-19, activists have barricaded a several-block area and erected a shrine to George Floyd. In describing the site, which has drawn pilgrims from around the nation, a local official unwittingly articulated the impulse at the heart of the adversary culture: “We have an obligation to keep sacred what is sacred.”

During the season of protests after the George Floyd-inspired riots, I wrote a critique of the “woke” movement that was published by the *Star Tribune*. “Sandalista” leader Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer, now an emeritus professor of “justice and peace studies” at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, wrote a response.

During the Sandinista Revolution’s glory days in the 1980s, Nelson-Pallmeyer had written a book that denounced “U.S.-Style totalitarianism” and praised Marxist Sandinistas for redistributing wealth from the rich to the poor. In his 2020 *Star Tribune* op-ed, he updated and reformulated his message. He was mainly concerned to denounce the U.S. for oppressing black citizens and praise social justice activists for fighting to eradicate “systemic racism.” His current crusade is no more likely to aid its putative beneficiaries than his ill-fated Nicaraguan crusade did. It serves the needs of the adversary culture, which in turn serves the emotional needs of college professors, at the expense of those actually needy in our society. ★

A version of this article first appeared in the February 2021 edition of First Things magazine.

OPEN DIALOGUE?

The opposition to opposing views coming from the Social Studies Standards Committee mirrors disturbing examples of leadership from one DFL senator.



John Hinderaker

A person who doesn't share DFL Sen. Jason Isaacson's views is untruthful, a joke, and not to be taken seriously.

In this issue, Katherine Kersten and Catrin Wigfall document the chilling story of Gov. Tim Walz's attempt to revolutionize how our children are taught history and other disciplines coming under the rubric of social studies. But that's just part of a bigger picture in which state leaders claim to care about students, achievement and diversity while their actions instead reflect insults, exclusion and hypocrisy.

Take DFL Sen. Jason Isaacson. In just the last two months, he twice abandoned decorum in public forums to disparage conservatives — and he had the gumption to emphasize the need for constructive dialogue while doing so.

The first time was in February, during an Education Finance and Policy Committee hearing in which senators discussed the potential use of *Something Happened In Our Town* in elementary schools. The book is about racial conflict, especially the interactions between blacks and the police — from the anti-police perspective.

Part of the testimony came from Kendall Qualls, the founder of TakeCharge Minnesota, a nonprofit organization that emphasizes the importance of education and family in the black community.

Qualls expressed concern over “a coordinated effort to promote critical race theory and this false narrative of white privilege and systemic racism,” he said. “It spreads fear, hatred and division among Americans, and it will create even more confusion for young people as it relates to race and how to get along with their fellow students.”

Instead, he wondered, why are we not focusing on the declining academic performance of our state's students, regardless of race? That drew Isaacson's ire.

“I don't think anything Kendall Qualls has said is accurate or truthful about critical race theory

and the existence of white privilege, and I want to make sure we're clear about that.”

For the record, Qualls is black and Isaacson is white, and we want to be clear about that. So did Republican Sen. Justin Eichorn, who suggested that Qualls might know a little bit more about being black in America than Isaacson, and that it's “troubling that we're saying his testimony is lying. Who are myself or Sen. Isaacson to tell a black man what his experiences are like?”

Even better was Isaacson's emphasizing the need to “create an open dialogue.” But how is it open if it's only one-sided?

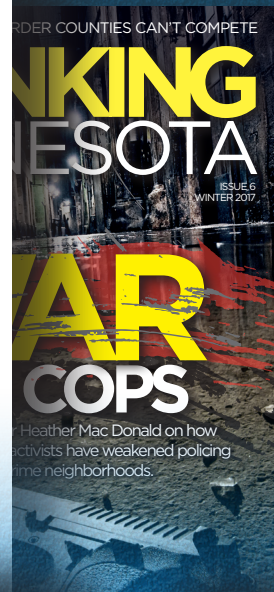
The situation was much the same a month later, only this time Isaacson had American Experiment's Catrin Wigfall in his crosshairs. Wigfall testified before the same committee as Qualls, in this case to support Education Savings Accounts, which would make state money available to families to meet students' needs through services including tutoring and mental health treatment.

Isaacson's response? He called Center of the American Experiment “a joke.”

“When you bring conservative think tanks in here, it's hard to take them seriously,” he added.

To sum up, a person who doesn't share Isaacson's views is untruthful, a joke, and not to be taken seriously. No wonder the mostly left-wing activists on the Social Studies Standards Committee — who want our children to be taught, among other things, that whiteness, Christianity and capitalism are oppressive to indigenous people and other minorities — were dismissive of the more than 5,000 comments coming from Minnesotans who are concerned about their proposals.

After all, if the leaders who write our laws are unwilling to have a truly open dialogue, how can we expect the officials who recommend new policy to be open-minded? ★



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