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THINKING MINNESOTA



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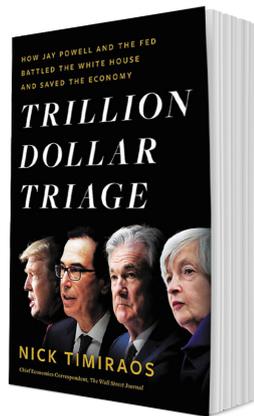
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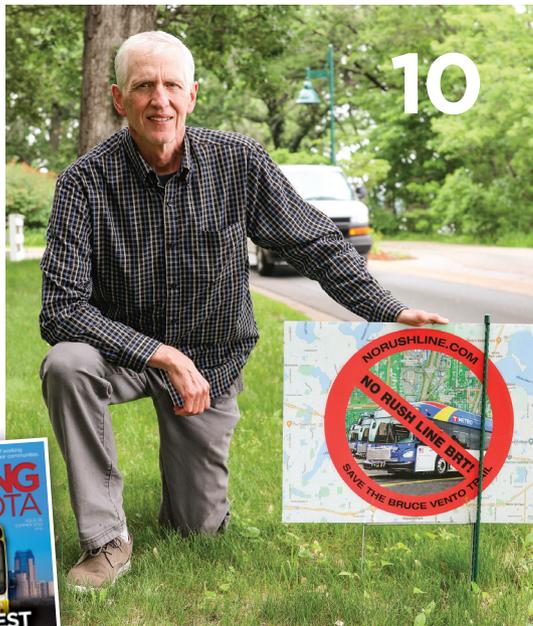
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COMMON SENSE

Without sacrificing a scintilla of journalistic integrity, *Thinking Minnesota* helps extend the influence of American Experiment in ways that matter.

This is my last issue as publisher and editor of *Thinking Minnesota*, as I finally fulfill the promise to my wife to end my days as being “kind of” retired and seek out other ways we can make mischief together. My thanks to American Experiment’s chairman Ron Eibensteiner for loaning me his column space to reflect on my experience with the magazine.

I’m blessed to look back on a career filled with jobs, projects and other professional experiences that kept me eager to get to my desk every morning. But nothing brought more satisfaction than watching the unfolding growth of *Thinking Minnesota*.

As Ron was in the process of persuading John Hinderaker to become president of American Experiment, the two started to meet in Ron’s conference room to reimagine the Center’s possibilities. Guided by the premise that “this will not be your grandpa’s think tank,” they planned to tear the Center down to its organizational studs. They would reinvigorate fundraising and hire a young, energetic policy staff to dive into issues of meaty relevance, even if occasionally controversial. And they plotted to enhance the Center’s policy work with creative marketing initiatives that far exceeded merely giving the website a much-needed upgrade. These would eventually include radio ads, billboards, bumper stickers, town meetings, webinars and even television ads.

I occasionally joined their meetings. On one of those early days — possibly even before John had officially accepted the job — I mentioned that replacing the Center’s anemic church-lady newsletter



Tom Mason

with a slickly-produced quarterly magazine would fit nicely into their arsenal of strategic communications weaponry. A magazine? They were in the midst of examining strategies to sharpen the Center’s effectiveness with the cutting-edge tools of the digital age, and I wanted to use a medium that first flourished in the era of Benjamin Franklin.

But they heard me out. The publishing marketplace, I said, was indeed littered with mass media print publications that couldn’t compete with the immediacy of online news or match digital advertising’s ability to target potential customers with unbelievable (even creepy) specificity. But not all print publications reacted equally. Niche publications — the kind that served readers with informa-

tion about unique or highly specialized interests that they couldn’t find elsewhere — were flourishing. I pointed out how my client Enterprise Minnesota, an organization that publishes a magazine for Minnesota’s manufacturers, had never been stronger in readership and revenue.

We all readily agreed that Minnesota’s center-right conservatives comprised a woefully under-served media market of potential readers.

I wrote a proposal for a magazine that, like everything else in the Hinderaker/Eibensteiner wheelhouse of think tank innovation, would resemble nothing like the product of a traditional think tank. It described how we would proudly assert conservative principles on relevant issues through lively writing, appealing graphic presentation and by maintaining high journalistic standards.

Like their vision for the new Center itself, *Thinking Minnesota* would avoid thumb-sucking analyses that merely admire problems or vilify opponents. Without sacrificing a scintilla of journalistic integrity, *Thinking Minnesota* would showcase the vision, agenda, people, and successes of the Center in ways that matter to people who matter. Perhaps best of all it would discuss public policies for their own sake, without the complications of politics and politicians.

I couldn’t guarantee success, but failure — a real possibility — would be because I misread the marketplace, not because we didn’t know what we were doing. I had more than 20 years’ worth of experience as a magazine editor and publisher, plus I had already found enthusiastic

interest from Scott Buchschacher, by my lights, the most talented magazine designer in the market.

I'll always be grateful that Ron and John agreed to test the market reaction by publishing a trial issue of *Thinking Minnesota*, with a special nod to Ron, who offered to underwrite the costs of the first issue out of his own pocket.

We've all been dumbstruck at the popularity of *Thinking Minnesota*. The press run of that first "test" magazine was 8,000 — the sum total of the database the Center had accumulated over its first two decades in operation. The issue you're reading right now will have been delivered to well over 100,000 mailboxes throughout Minnesota and beyond. And that's circulation. When you factor in the industry-standard "pass-along" rate of 2.5 readers for each printed copy, *Thinking Minnesota* is reaching a quarter of a million Minnesotans per issue.

Ron provided a favorite plot point in the life of *Thinking Minnesota* on the day he emailed an iPhone photo of a two-inch stack of subscriber requests that sat neatly bound on top of the receptionist's desk, all from a single day's mail delivery. For my part, I was always on the prowl to find new readers, even one at a time. In the days before my cardiologist sentenced me to home-arrest to wait out the early duration of COVID-19, I kept a box or two of *Thinking Minnesota* magazines in the backseat of my old Audi. I would leave copies of the magazine in the lobbies and waiting rooms of any place I happened to visit — my barber, car mechanic, various doctors' offices, restaurants, coffee shops, and even my church. I was gratified when an administrator at my cardiac-therapy gym asked me to bring more. "People keep taking them," she said.

The success of *Thinking Minnesota* is not because of me. I may have developed and helped maintain the magazine's editorial approach, and we must praise the creative design work by Mr. Buchschacher, but its

secret sauce rests primarily with the remarkable team of policy fellows who independently conceive the ideas and produce the first drafts of copy. Their reader-friendly editorial output is fact-based, action-oriented and relevant. Politically-charged education standards must be exposed and stopped. The CRT activities and other extremist behaviors in public schools (like Edina) demand illumination and reform. The stunning failure by public officials to control race riots in Minneapolis demanded clear-eyed analysis. Government spending and economic policies require constant scrutiny. Wind energy is an ineffective energy source that fails to live up to its public promises. Expanding Iron Range mining will benefit the entire state. And someone has to monitor the unchecked power of the Met Council.

Thinking Minnesota reflects the important mission of Center of the American Experiment. If we don't expose the leftist agenda that is jealously guarded by mainstream sources of news, who will? Thanks for reading. If you aren't a subscriber, fill out and send in one of the two subscriber cards stapled into this magazine. And fill out another one for the young friend or relative who is not getting any exposure to "the other side" of public policy in Minnesota. They won't find it elsewhere.

* * *

Capable hands. When I announced my intent to retire more than two years ago, I pledged to Ron and John that I wouldn't leave until we found a capable replacement. We knew the transition would take some time, not because I'm so talented, but because the already depleted list of potential applicants with experience editing long-form print journalism shrinks even further when you add the filter "center-right conservative." I'm very pleased that managing editor Jenna Stocker will take the full reins as editor starting with the next issue. We all think it will be worth the wait. ★

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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.

But in either case as well as others, American Experiment's work simply would not be possible — our many megaphones silenced — without the support of friends like you.

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Minnesota's Uninsured Rate Increases as Individual Insurance Premiums Spike

death spiral, rising premiums became out of reach for middle- and higher-income Minnesotans with incomes too high to qualify for subsidies. In 2017, these Minnesotans landed squarely in an affordability crisis. Minnesota went from a number one ranking in the country on premium affordability to 37th in just three years. As a result, many Minnesotans had nowhere to turn for health coverage and, as the accompanying figure shows, the state's uninsured rate jumped from 4.1 percent in 2015 to 6.1 percent in 2017 as premiums spiked.

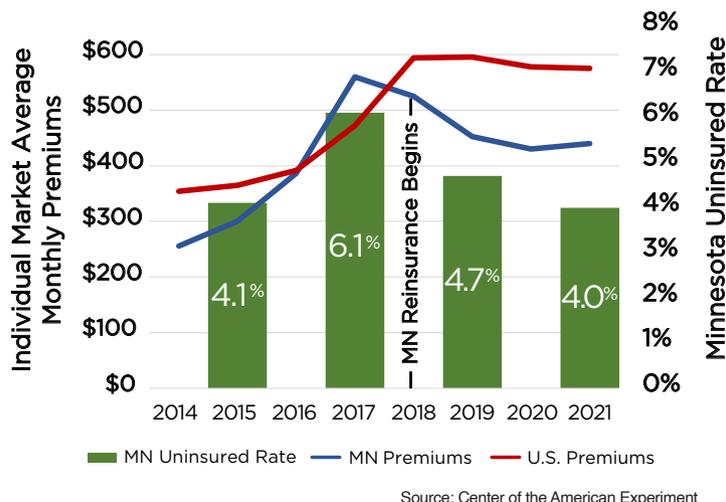
Republican state legislators deliver a solution

The people losing coverage were not Republicans or Democrats — they were Minnesotans. Yet somehow helping this group became a partisan issue.

At the time, Republicans held control of the Minnesota House and Senate. Knowing they had to address this crisis, they passed legislation to establish the Minnesota Premium Security Plan. This established a reinsurance program that funds a portion of high-cost claims in the individual market. Funding these claims reduces claims costs for the entire market and, as a result, lowers premiums for everyone in the market.

The program operates as a partnership with the federal government under a State Innovation Waiver. By reducing premiums, reinsurance also reduces the amount of federal tax credits coming to the state. The federal government pays a large portion of the reinsurance payment as “pass-through” funding to replace the value of the premium tax credits that would have otherwise gone to state residents.

Reinsurance passed largely on party lines. Dayton refused to sign the bill but still allowed it to become law.



Source: Center of the American Experiment

RAND estimates over 82,000 more people enrolled in unsubsidized coverage in 2020 than would have enrolled without the reinsurance program. They emphasize how this enrollment impact is a “large effect” considering the entire unsubsidized market the year before the waiver was just over 90,000.

This enrollment impact shows how reinsurance stopped the death spiral and saved Minnesota's individual health insurance market for the unsubsidized.

This partisanship is in stark contrast to every other state that established similar reinsurance programs, such as in Oregon, where Republican Sen. Jackie Winters carried the reinsurance bill that was signed by Democratic Gov. Kate Brown. Since then, 12 more states passed reinsurance programs with bipartisan support.

Federal evaluation shows reinsurance saved the market

Minnesota's reinsurance program led to an immediate premium reduction in 2018. The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) reported that reinsurance lowered premiums by nearly 17 percent in that year, which rose to over 21 percent in 2021. This dropped the state's average monthly premiums to the lowest in the country in 2019. While Minnesota gave up this top spot in 2021, premiums are still among the lowest in the country.

Lower premiums are a good indicator of success, but certainly not the only consideration. Maybe the more important question is how reinsurance impacted enrollment.

CMS commissioned the RAND corporation to evaluate Minnesota's reinsurance program and, in particular, to quantify its impact on enrollment.

Without reinsurance, enrollment would have plummeted to under 20,000 according to the RAND estimates, which would have been an unsalvageable drop.

Reinsurance authorized for another five years

The reinsurance program was set to expire this year. Though there was inevitable partisan bickering over whether to keep the program going, the Senate and the House eventually passed legislation to extend it for another five years on a bipartisan basis. Every once in a while, even partisans can't argue with results.

While saving the individual market from the throes of a death spiral is a good news story, the state's relatively affordable premiums remain expensive. Last year individual market premiums were still 83 percent higher than in 2013, the year before the ACA took full effect.

Reinsurance is just one tool to help address the high cost of health care. America's health care system suffers from a lack of competitive pressure on health plans, drug manufacturers, hospitals, and other providers to keep costs low. That's why American Experiment develops and advances policies to promote competition across the entire health care system. ★

—Peter Nelson

Economy

Economic Bait and Switch

Rather than help, the IRA does the opposite — hitting Minnesota’s manufacturing industry particularly hard.

On August 16, President Joe Biden signed into law the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA). Since then, lawmakers representing Minnesota in the U.S. Congress — like Ilhan Omar — have touted the bill as a victory for Minnesota. According to the Minnesota Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party, not only will it lower inflation, but it also won’t raise taxes.

The IRA does do many things, but despite its name, it will not lower inflation. And, not only will the IRA not reduce inflation, but it will *raise* taxes. In fact, Minnesota will probably be among the highest burdened states with these new taxes.

Why is this the case?

What the IRA actually does

Minnesota is a manufacturing-intensive state. In 2021, for example, 14 percent of the state’s GDP came from manufacturing, compared to 11 percent of the national GDP. In fact, Minnesota had the 16th highest share of manufacturing GDP in 2021.

Under a preliminary assessment, the Joint Committee on Taxation estimated that the 15 percent minimum tax on book (or pre-tax) income would disproportionately affect the manufacturing industry. The committee estimated that the manufacturing industry was poised to pay about 50 percent of the new taxes.

This was due to the fact that the earlier version of the IRA eliminated the 100 percent bonus depreciation — which allows companies to fully and immediately deduct the cost of their purchases from their book incomes. Without the bonus depreciation, capital-intensive companies — like manufacturing — would report higher

book incomes and thereby pay higher taxes under the IRA.

Since then, the IRA has gone through some changes, and the final version of the bill still retains the 100 percent bonus depreciation. This effectively reduces new taxes that would fall on subject companies.

There is a catch, however. The bonus depreciation provision will be phased out between 2023 and 2026. This means that after the phaseout, with a normal depreciation schedule, the IRA will work as originally intended: disproportionately raising taxes for the manufacturing industry and other capital-intensive industries.

Moreover, as the *Daily Signal* estimates, even with the bonus depreciation in place, manufacturing would still “bear at least 2.5 times as much of the burden of the tax, relative to the sector’s size as a share of the economy.”

Manufacturing is already troubled, new taxes won’t help

Research already shows that high corporate taxes are bad for the economy. They discourage investment, job creation, and income growth.

But for manufacturing, things will get worse. Manufacturing has been in decline both nationally and in Minnesota. As the *Daily Signal* also notes, “Employment in U.S. manufacturing dropped by about 33 percent between 2000 and 2010. Since then, manufacturing’s steep decline has reversed slightly, but manufacturing jobs

remain more than 25 percent below 2000 levels.”

In Minnesota, the manufacturing industry has followed this trend, losing more than 20 percent of its jobs between 2000 and 2020.

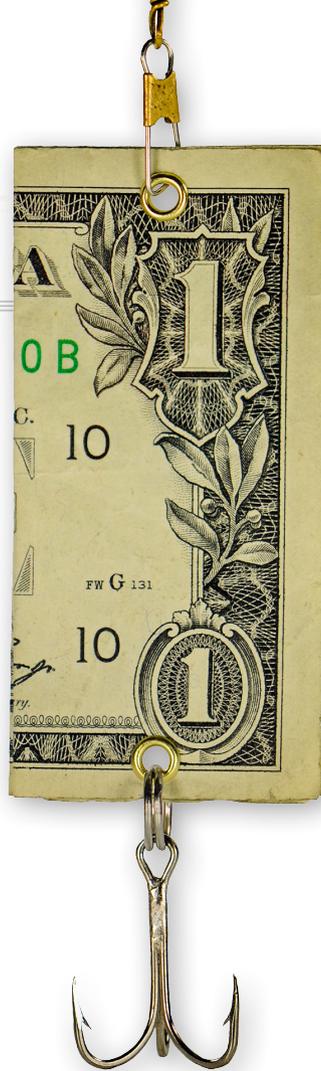
Furthermore, between 2018 and 2020, GDP in the manufacturing industry declined. While in 2021 the industry started to recover, these high taxes will potentially negatively affect that recovery.

Minnesota businesses do not need new taxes

Minnesota is already a high-tax state. Any new taxes at the federal level would affect our state’s businesses and workers disproportionately negative compared to other low-tax states.

And despite its many promises and applause by members of Congress, the IRA will impact one of our most important industries — manufacturing — more heavily, further hurting Minnesotans and Minnesota business already suffering under burdensome taxes. ★

—Martha Njolomole



An increasing share of the papers published by Federal Reserve Banks are devoted to activist topics.

Update

Stopped Dead in its Tracks

Without White Bear Lake, ridership numbers can't support federal funding for the Bus Rapid Transit Project.

There have been several major developments regarding the Purple Line Bus Rapid Transit project since it was featured in our summer 2022 *Thinking Minnesota* issue.

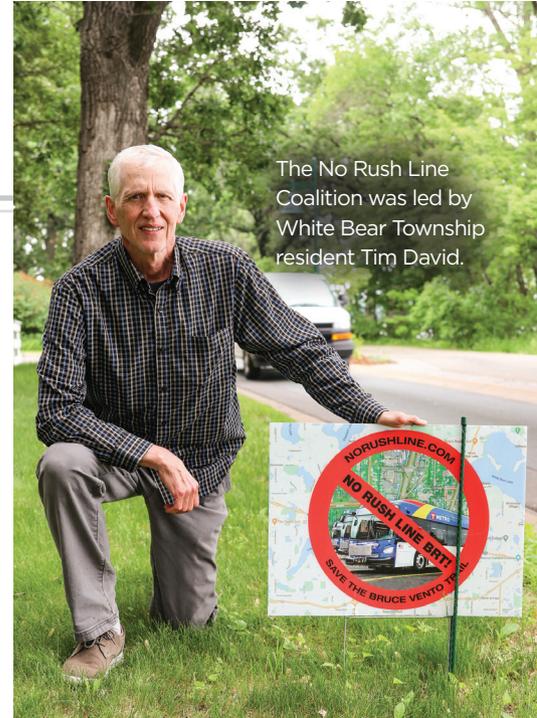
Tim David and his grassroots organization known as the No Rush Line Coalition did not rest on their laurels after successfully convincing the White Bear Lake City Council to pass a resolution against the Rush Line Bus Rapid Transit project. That resolution caused the Metropolitan Council to announce that several new routes were being considered, and none of them would encroach upon the city limits of White Bear Lake.



After the White Bear Lake victory, David and his crew of volunteers turned their attention to the City of Maplewood, focusing on how the Purple Line (renamed by the Met Council to better fit into their system) would drastically change the Bruce Vento Trail.

The Bruce Vento Trail is a popular biking and walking trail that begins in downtown St. Paul and travels through Maplewood on abandoned railroad right-of-way. The corridor is currently lined with trees and provides a wooded path, making visitors forget they are in the middle of the city.

The plan for the Purple Line was to co-locate the bus route in the same



The No Rush Line Coalition was led by White Bear Township resident Tim David.

corridor as the current trail. That would require bulldozing hundreds of trees on either side of the path to make room for two bus lanes and a rebuilt bituminous bike path.

The coalition organized the “Rally to Save Bruce Vento Trail” on July 21, 2022, at the Phalen Park Pavilion in St. Paul. According to David, about 150 people attended, completely filling the parking area, with some attendees walking several blocks to the event. After a brief presentation on the project, the floor was open to citizens in similar fashion to the town meeting held in White Bear Lake in October 2021.

“We wanted people to understand that the project was not a done deal just because Met Council and Ramsey County leaders supported it,” says David. “White Bear Lake stood up and said ‘no’ and Maplewood can do the same thing.”

The event took on the atmosphere of a pep rally as people clapped and cheered the idea that citizens, not bureaucrats, can decide how their communities can and should operate. Residents also spoke passionately about their opposition to the bus line and what it would do to the Bruce Vento Trail, which many described as an essential part of Maplewood. The coalition brought 50 “Stop the Rush Line” yard signs to be given out for a \$5 donation. The signs sold out and a waiting list was formed with additional signs on back-order. Organizers were amazed at the attendance and passion against this project.



Residents collect yard signs and show support at the “Rally to Save Bruce Vento Trail” on July 21 at the Phalen Park Pavilion in St. Paul.

Stunning development

However, the No Rush Line Coalition may not have to host any more rallies, put up additional yard signs or convince any more city councils to oppose the project.

After the White Bear Lake setback, the Met Council regrouped and recommended three alternate routes. One travelled west into Vadnais Heights, ending at an already built park and ride facility. A second route travelled east to serve the students, staff, and faculty of Century College. And a third alternate simply ended at the Maplewood Mall Transit Center in Maplewood.

Unfortunately for supporters of the project, as it stands today, the Met Council cannot meet the federal requirements for ridership needed to receive funding. This major development was announced in an email on July 27, 2022, from Met Council staff: "...[W]e now know, due to changes in cost, corridor demographic and ridership projection guidance, the Purple Line project would not currently qualify for federal funding with any of the three potential northern endpoints in Maplewood, Vadnais Heights or at Century College."

It appears that without the density of neighborhoods in White Bear Lake, the project can't meet the ridership formula necessary to receive federal funding. The entire project is on life support.

It's a good reminder that this project has always been an application for federal grant funding from the Federal Transit Administration's New Starts program and as such, Minnesota has been competing with other states and cities for funding. It's a pleasant surprise to learn the federal government has in place guidelines to make sure money isn't wasted on projects that cost hundreds of millions of dollars and move very few people. That the Purple Line can't even meet these basic benchmarks speaks volumes about the efficacy of the project.

The lesson? Grassroots activism works, and leaders sometimes listen. ★

—Bill Walsh



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Scandal



A Tangled Web of Deceit

Digging deeper into Feeding Our Future reveals widespread connections.

Since the FBI raids on Feeding Our Future and related organizations on January 20, to date only two people involved have been arrested, both on charges of passport fraud. One of the two has pled guilty, and 48 have been indicted on federal charges.

American Experiment covered the events and players involved from the beginning, including the Safari Restaurant, which, according to an FBI search warrant, was conducting fraud on an industrial scale. The business also received publicity due to its close connection to Congresswoman Ilhan Omar and other Minneapolis-based politicians.

In 2020, Safari Restaurant operated its own free-food distribution site at its now closed central Minneapolis outlet, claiming to serve up to 5,000 children per day. The program was operated under the federal Summer Food Service Program, overseen locally by the state Department of Education (MDE).

In the autumn of 2020, MDE determined that for-profit restaurants could no longer host free-food distribution sites. At that point, Safari switched from being a distribution center to a vendor to other sites across the state. The FBI claims that little of the money Safari received from May 2020 to November 2021 was used to buy food.

Jeremiah Ellison, a member of the Minneapolis City Council

and son of the state's attorney general, received contributions from four of seven figures associated with Safari, all of whose names appear in the FBI search warrants. Each of the four donated \$600, and all the donations were received on December 20, 2021, according to filings at the county's campaign finance agency.

Two other Minneapolis Democrats, State Senator Omar Fateh and Congresswoman Ilhan Omar, received contributions in 2021 from some of these men. Sharmarke Issa, who headed the Minneapolis Public Housing Authority (MPHA), appointed twice by Mayor Jacob Frey in 2019 and 2021, has since resigned. He has been accused by the U.S. Attorney for Minnesota of buying property with the ill-gotten gains of the Feeding Our Future scandal. MPHA's chief executive is Abdi Warsame, a former member of the Minneapolis City Council, and who was appointed to his post by Frey in 2020.

Issa's business partner is Abdi Salah, a senior aide to Frey. Salah resigned his city position in February, telling the *Star Tribune* it was for personal reasons unrelated to the scandal. Before moving to the mayor's office, Salah had worked as a senior aide to then-city councilman Warsame. Warsame's city council campaign account is still active. However, no reports have been filed for calendar years 2019, 2020, or 2021.

Warsame's successor on the city council, representing Ward 6, is Jamal Osman, who has his own ties to the free-food scandal through another organization, Stigma-Free International.

Issa purchased a four-unit apartment building with Salah in south Minneapolis for \$386,000. The city's biggest landlord (through the housing authority) became a small-time landlord in his own right.

According to the FBI, approximately \$200,000 of the building's purchase price came from the free-food scandal through Salah's brother, a part-owner of Safari.

Issa and Salah are not Frey's only connections to the Feeding Our Future scandal. The mayor took in \$6,000 in political donations from six of the seven figures linked to the affair. Another of the six, Abdikadir Mohamud, was appointed by Frey to a public safety working group in December 2021.

With every layer uncovered in the Feeding Our Future scandal and the Free Food program, more of the associated players are found linked to Minneapolis politicians. The question remains: Who will be the next? ★

—Bill Glahn



FEEDING OUR FUTURE Minneapolis Contributions 2021

	J. Frey	J. Ellison	O. Fateh	I. Omar
Abdinasir Abshir	\$1,000	\$600	\$1,000	
Abdihakim Ali Ahmed	\$1,000		\$1,000	\$2,700
Abdirahman Ahmed				\$2,700
Ahmed A. Ghedi	\$1,000	\$600	\$1,000	\$2,700
Abdikadir Mohamud	\$1,000			
Salim Said	\$1,000	\$600	\$1,000	
Abdulkadir Nur Salah	\$1,000	\$600		

News in North Dakota

Fargo's Pledge controversy, staff additions, and events.



Participants at the Fargo stop of American Experiment North Dakota's Critical Race Theory tour get ready for the presentation from policy fellow Catrin Wigfall.

American Experiment continues to lead the way in exposing public school malfeasance as the 2022-2023 school year begins. After the Fargo school board voted in April to recite the Pledge of Allegiance before every meeting, the board voted 7-2 to reject the recitation on August 9, ruling that it didn't align with the district's diversity, equity and inclusion priorities. "The board reciting the Pledge runs counter to our district's philosophy," said board vice president Seth Holden, who introduced the motion to rescind recitation and who had taken to kneeling during the Pledge at previous meetings.

American Experiment set up a "Take Action" initiative, creating a landing page on its North Dakota website where Fargo residents could email the school board to voice their concerns. CAE's director of communications Bill Walsh explained, "It's important for the school board to hear from parents and the

community that they should be prioritizing school excellence and achievement rather than divisive and controversial performances like what Holden is attempting to do." Over 220 emails were sent to the Fargo school board through the website.

School board president Tracie Newman called for a special meeting on Thursday, August 18 "to discuss the impact our previous decision has had on the District, its operations, and its image, and to offer a motion to reinstate the Pledge of Allegiance at the beginning of our regular meetings directly following the call to order." At the meeting, the board reversed its previous decision and voted to reinstate the Pledge.

On September 1, American Experiment North Dakota welcomed Jennifer Benson (Fargo) as its first statewide executive director and the Center's first official employee in the state. Benson

will help oversee and coordinate events, interact with the legislature, and support other activities that help facilitate the organization's impact across the state. Benson served for eight years on the Fargo school board and has a history of involvement in conservative causes and public policy issues in North Dakota. A Fargo native, Benson graduated from Fargo North High School and earned her bachelor's degree from MSUM in Moorhead, Minn.

Upcoming events in North Dakota include CAE economist John Phelan and energy expert Isaac Orr presenting their new policy paper, "Energy Leadership: How American Energy Production Can Make the World Safer" in Fargo and Bismarck.

For more information about American Experiment North Dakota, visit the website at www.AmericanExperimentND.org. ★

National news

American Experiment's director of communications Bill Walsh was the first to expose the new agreement between the Minneapolis teachers' union and Minneapolis Public Schools that would take effect next year. In his post on American Experiment's website from March 28, Walsh detailed the new agreement, which contains new retention details that garnered national attention.

The contract stipulates that white teachers be laid off before teachers of color regardless of seniority. This potential violation of the Civil Rights Act, as well as the Equal Protection Clause of the Constitution, drew media attention from *Fox News* and the U.K.'s *Daily Mail*.

Education policy fellow Catrin Wigfall contributed to both news organizations.

Policy fellow Catrin Wigfall was quoted in *Fox News* and the U.K.'s *Daily Mail*.

"While increasing teachers of color is a worthy goal, the layoff provision in the Minneapolis teachers' union agreement with the district is a political solution that likely won't stand up in court and is not good, long-term policy," she told *Fox News Digital* on August 16. "In fact, the whole last-in, first-out system should be thrown out, as it does a disservice to all young teachers who are qualified, excellent educators. The goal is worthy, but the approach is misplaced."

In the *Daily Mail* Wigfall explained that "the district risks finding itself embroiled in lawsuits, which would detract time and resources from improving the district's abysmal academic performance record."

Events and appearances

Farmfest

American Experiment continued its annual presence at Farmfest with a booth.

Held on August 2-4 in Redwood County, this event afforded the Center an opportunity to connect with rural Minnesota and discuss issues having an impact outside the Twin Cities.

Issues Bootcamp

American Experiment held an issues bootcamp on July 26 at the Vadnais Heights Commons. The one-day nonpartisan course was attended by candidates for the Minnesota legislature. Communications director Bill Walsh gave an overview of how the legislature works and the Center's policy fellows gave presentations regarding education, the state budget, health care, energy and public safety.

State Fair

American Experiment returned to the Minnesota State Fair with a booth at the KS95 tent outside the Grandstand. On Saturday, August 27, the Center's policy fellows and staff were present to talk with Minnesotans from across the state about the latest initiatives, research reports, and upcoming events.

In addition to handing out copies of the latest *Thinking Minnesota* and policy briefs, the steady stream of booth visitors were able to spin a prize wheel for Center merchandise and register for a \$250 gas card to highlight American Experiment's "No Gas Station Inflation" campaign. Center president John Hinderaker, who helped man the booth, was pleased by the high interest. "That we had a long line from 9 a.m. when we opened until we closed at 5 p.m. is a testament to public interest in issues that directly impact everyday Minnesotans."

Webinars and in-person events

• Public safety policy fellow David Zimmer was at Brooklyn Center's Heritage Center on July 28 as part of the "Crime in 2022" series. The panel discussion included Brooklyn Park's Interim Chief of Police Mark Bruley and Dawanna Witt from the Hennepin County Sheriff's Office. The event provided an



Communications director Bill Walsh speaks to candidates at CAE's Issues Bootcamp in July.

opportunity to hear from the community's public safety leaders and hear proven strategies to reduce crime.

• Zimmer also held a webinar on September 13, "Understanding Minnesota's Crime Problem." Zimmer presented the latest statistics and trends regarding crime and the criminal justice system in Minnesota since officially becoming a high crime state.

• On August 26, Isaac Orr and John Phelan appeared at a press conference in Duluth announcing their new policy report, "Energy Leadership: How American Energy Production Can Make the World Safer." The two were joined by Congressmen Pete Stauber (MN-08) and Tom Tiffany (WI-07), both members of the Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources. The report emphasizes the importance of reforming the regulations that are preventing American industry from leading the charge for secure, affordable supplies of energy and making the world a safer place.

Upcoming events and initiatives

• American Experiment's Fall Briefing takes place in Waconia on Saturday, October 15. The event at the Winery at Sovereign Estate will feature former congresswoman Tulsi Gabbard. The former U.S. representative from Hawaii and 2020 presidential candidate will offer her insights into today's political environment and what is on the political and cultural horizon heading into the mid-term elections in a keynote address. *Thinking Minnesota* will feature the event and a Q&A with Gabbard in the winter issue. You can find out more information about this event and future events on our website at AmericanExperiment.org.

• On September 1, American Experiment launched "Save Our Sherco," an

initiative to save Unit 2 at the Sherburne County Generating Station. The regional grid that includes Minnesota currently has a 1,200-megawatt shortfall — enough to power half the homes in Minnesota — and that problem will only get worse if they shut down any of the units at the Sherco plant. Yard signs are also available to area residents. Information on how to obtain a lawn sign or volunteer with this initiative can be found at the Save Our Sherco website at AmericanExperiment.org/sos-save-our-sherco/

• The Center started a new take-action program in conjunction with policy fellow David Zimmer’s new report, “Minnesota’s Crime Problem” aimed at telling Gov. Walz and elected leaders to address rising crime in the state. “It’s Official: Minnesota is a High Crime State” aims to draw attention to this dangerous situation. People can

go to the website AmericanExperiment.org/minnesota-is-now-a-high-crime-state/ to send an email to the governor to express concerns regarding this issue.

• Adjunct policy fellow Bill Glahn will be holding a webinar explaining the details of the Feeding Our Future school lunch funding scandal, including the breaking news as this issue goes to print that U.S. Attorney for Minn. Andy Luger announced indictments against 48 people, which he called the largest pandemic-related fraud in the U.S. The case was featured in the spring issue of *Thinking Minnesota*; this issue contains a follow-up. For more information on this event visit our website at AmericanExperiment.org. You can also sign up for the Center’s newsletter to keep up on the latest news and events as they happen at AmericanExperiment.org/get-involved/newsletter/.

Notables

• Senior policy fellow Katherine Kersten’s opinion piece, “At Minnesota State, equity’s in, learning is out” was published in the *Star Tribune* on August 28. In it, Kersten details the new Equity 2030 toolkit to be implemented throughout the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system. Her piece was an adapted version of the feature in this issue of *Thinking Minnesota*.

• On September 12, policy fellow Isaac Orr, policy analyst Mitch Rolling, and economist John Phelan released their report, “The High Cost of 100 Percent Carbon-Free Electricity by 2040.” All American Experiment reports can be downloaded from the Center’s website (AmericanExperiment.org). ★

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Grassroots



School board candidates, parents, and supporters gathered for MPA's rally at the State Capitol on August 4, 2022.

The New Group on the Block

Minnesota Parents Alliance is off and running to support parent-centered school board candidates and members.

On December 4, 2021, a group of school board candidates, campaign managers, and parents got together to debrief that year's election. Instead of mundane introductions followed by an impersonal strategy session, candidates from around the state took two hours explaining the details of their journey — their frustration with the state of public education, the emotional toll of running for public office, and the feeling of being isolated and without the support, resources, and training needed to put together a winning campaign to take back public education from more established (meaning almost always union endorsed) candidates.

Everyone agreed: Minnesota needed a statewide *parent* organization that could support and train candidates to win in

school board races. There are enough groups (American Experiment among them) that advocate for broader education reform such as school choice. The real fight, according to these parents, is at the local level.

Thus was born the Minnesota Parents Alliance (MPA), a new Minnesota education group with the goal of educating and empowering parents to engage in their local school communities as strong advocates for academic achievement, equality, and parental rights. The MPA is helping recruit and train candidates for local school board races across the state, as the battle for the future of education shifts to the local level and more people are disillusioned by the teachers' union control and

influence on education policy.

This follows in the footsteps of a growing nationwide movement of parents who are reclaiming control over their kids' education from special interest groups. Many feel teachers' unions and other special interest groups don't prioritize kids' education or parents' concerns.

National wave

The 2021 governor's race in Virginia could foreshadow a wave of discontent with parents after two years of school shutdowns and divisive curriculum. After Democrat candidate Terry McAuliffe told voters he didn't think "parents should be telling schools what they should teach," parents overwhelmingly flocked to the campaign of Republican Glenn Youngkin and carried him to victory.

Conservative school board candidates in Florida this August also won races running on a platform that highlighted parental rights, school choice, and transparency around what students are learning in school, particularly on the topics of race and gender identity.

New representation

Cristine Trooien, one of the participants in that December 2021 meeting, is MPA's first executive director. Trooien formed a Political Action Committee in 2021 to help candidates in two western Hennepin County school districts run for school board. After coming up short against well-funded, union-backed candidates, she knew more support was needed.

"For too long in Minnesota the voice of parents has been pushed aside by powerful special interest groups like the teachers' union," said Trooien. "We are actively organizing and training parents to win seats on local school boards, and 2022 is shaping up to be the year of the parent."

MPA conducted its first campaign school in May with over 75 candidates in

attendance. A second school was held on July 30 focusing on fundraising, message development, and voter contact. A voter guide published by the parent-led organization is now available on their website at www.MinnesotaParents.org to help voters choose candidates committed to academic excellence, equality, and parental rights.

Campaign kick-off rally

MPA kicked off the 2022 campaign year with a rally of over 150 people at the State Capitol on Thursday, August 4, 2022. The event featured candidates excited to tell Minnesota why they are running and how they will support and empower parents. Now, parents across the state are stepping up to run for school board seats in record numbers and have organized strong groups of engaged parents in their school communities.

MPA candidates advance in primaries

Every local school board candidate supported by MPA advanced past the primary and will appear on the general election ballot this November. "We are thrilled the support of parents carried these qualified candidates through to the general election," said Trooien. "The primary was a nice warm up for our new organization, and we look forward to helping many more candidates stand up for academic achievement and parental rights this November."

After limited success in 2021, MPA is preparing candidates across the state to win local school board elections and make an immediate difference in the lives of students. It's past time parents have a seat at the education table. ★

—Bill Walsh

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Did you know American Experiment has local chapters in Rochester, Owatonna, Duluth and Mankato?

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TOM STEWARD

CRIMINAL EDUCATION

Outrage grows over the escalating crime and violence at the U of M.

It's nerve-wracking enough sending a child off to college these days given rampant partying, political correctness, and crushing student loans. But parents of students on the University of Minnesota's Twin Cities campus now face a chilling new concern: fear their child could get carjacked, shot, mugged, or robbed.

Authorities report a 45 percent increase in violent crime on and near the U's Minneapolis campus since 2019. Police data for the U of M "neighborhood" show there were an average of 18 violent crimes per month in the first half of 2022, versus an average of 12 violent crimes per month in 2019.

An attack near the school's medical complex on August 9, which prompted a campus safety alert, has become all too common: "U of M Twin Cities assault occurred at 12:15 p.m. Victim was chased by the suspect who threatened her with a knife. Victim successfully escaped...[suspect] last seen under 14th Ave. near Dinkytown. Be cautious and avoid the area."

For Brian Peck of Maple Grove, the



Tom Steward

wake-up call came when his son texted video of a June 3 gun fight at a notorious non-university residential building just down from his fraternity house. More than 50 shots were fired as the gunmen

and panicked students scattered in all directions, leaving a 15-year-old boy wounded in the leg.

Peck, a 1994 Gophers graduate, had no clue about the peril students face at his alma mater. "When that shooting happened my son said, 'Mom and dad, do you know that every single day I wake up to go to class I'm scared for my life? I don't know if I'm going to get mugged, shot or beaten up and every single night I go to bed I think, wow, I survived another day.'"

Yet that wasn't the first high-profile shootout near the U. A year earlier, a gun fight in Dinkytown left five people wounded. Residents like Morgan McElroy witnessed a steady escalation of violence and lawlessness while living in a Dinkytown apartment.

"My first year living there felt totally safe. I would walk around at night alone," said McElroy, a 2021 U graduate. "By my senior year somebody was literally murdered in my apartment complex parking garage, so I definitely did not feel safe. When I go back there now, I won't walk anywhere alone. I don't even like parking



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my car out there when it's dark."

The imminent danger and inability to contain it led hundreds of parents to join forces more than a year and a half ago in a grassroots Facebook group to publicize the threat and press officials to take action. The group, "U of MN parents – campus safety," now has 2,000 members. But they didn't get very far until the gun battle across from the U's armory and athletic complex went viral.

"As a parent group we'd been emailing, texting, tweeting, writing letters,

University president Joan Gabel's decision to reduce some ties with MPD after George Floyd's death in May 2020 particularly rubs many the wrong way... [T]he number of university cops remains 20 percent under the authorized force of 66 full-time officers.

you name it to Mayor Frey, to [president] Joan Gabel, to the U," said Erin Brumms, whose son's roommate was robbed of his cell phone and forced to empty his Venmo account. "But no responses, very canned responses. There was definitely a feeling of apathy, and it really angered the parent group."

One of their key concerns? A perceived lack of campus support for police, complicating recruitment, and retention of officers. University president Joan Gabel's decision to reduce some ties with MPD after George Floyd's death in May 2020 particularly rubs many the wrong way. As of this writing,

the number of university cops remains 20 percent under the authorized force of 66 full-time officers.

"Most disappointing is how some of the officers are being treated in the last two years," UMPD Chief Matt Clark said at the Board of Regents meeting in June. "...They believe in the university, but when they're not treated well, they won't stay. I had four young officers come on just recently and three of the four quit, and they cited the reasons of this behavior."

The relentless parental pressure and increased media coverage finally got through to the Board of Regents and top administrators.

"We've all been hearing from students and parents about concerns with safety," Regent Darrin Rosha said at the June meeting. "And I would suggest we're hearing from a very small percentage of the people who actually have those concerns."

"I am alarmed and concerned just like all of us," president Joan Gabel said at the meeting. "And I want to express on behalf of everyone at the university that the administration wants nothing more than to address this challenge and bring crime down."

Since then, the university has held public safety forums to give parents a platform to vent their grievances. The administration also included parents on a hastily created Strategic Safety Advisory Committee that's pushing for new MPD and sheriff patrols, hiring more university police, more U officers assisting in off-campus areas, and 10 new community service officers, all part of a fall safety campaign to better secure the campus and areas around it.

In the meantime, however, Erin Brumms tells her son to holster his cell phone, pack Mace and not take chances. "I don't know that we as a parent group can do it," Brumms said. "But we're certainly going to try." ★

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Unwelcome Imposition

California imposes strict clean car policies on the state's auto dealerships — so why should Minnesotans have to pay the price?

Minnesota auto dealers want to strike down California's clean car mandate in Minnesota.

California's clean car rules require auto dealers to offer a minimum number of zero-emission vehicles (ZEVs) and low-emission vehicles (LEVs), even if there's no consumer demand for them.

"It's a supply mandate," says Scott Lambert, president of the Minnesota Auto Dealers Association (MADA). "That's a dangerous thing in the vehicle world."

Minnesota adopted the California rules in December 2021. The rules require that 35 percent of vehicles that manufacturers sell to dealers be ZEVs by 2025. And by 2035, no dealer will be allowed to sell new gasoline-powered vehicles.

The rules were created by the California Air Resources Board (CARB) and have been adopted by 17 states, including Minnesota. Because they were adopted "as amended," any changes CARB makes must be incorporated in Minnesota.

"These rules actually allow [CARB] to literally make new rules that automatically become part of Minnesota's law," says James Dickey, senior trial counsel at the Upper Midwest Law Center (UMLC).

Represented by the UMLC, MADA filed a petition for declaratory judgment last June in the state Court of Appeals. They hope the Court will overturn it.

"It's a violation of Article 1, Section 1 of the Minnesota Constitution," explains Dickey, "because all power is vested in



Because neighboring states don't have the same requirements, auto dealers in Minnesota that border states without the mandate are put at a serious competitive disadvantage.

the people of Minnesota — not another state."

The rules require all vehicles sold by manufacturers to be certified by the California standards incorporated in Minn. R. 7023. During the rulemaking process, the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) admitted that the rules will increase car prices by at least \$900 for ZEVs and \$1,139 for LEVs.

Because neighboring states don't have the same requirements, auto dealers in Minnesota are put at a serious competitive disadvantage. Dealers in Fergus Falls, for example, report that around 40 percent of their sales come from out-of-

state customers — a share that would drop dramatically should their prices artificially rise.

Offering a car that no one wants comes with a price. Auto dealers pay the manufacturers up front for their inventory, so every day that a car sits on their lot costs them money.

UMLC and MADA, which represents hundreds of Minnesota auto dealers and 98 percent of the market, believe the state's adoption of the California rules was impermissible for three reasons.

First, delegating rulemaking power to another state's board violates Minnesota's sovereignty. Both the state constitution and Minnesota statute prohibit this. Furthermore, because the rules were adopted "as amended," any changes CARB makes must also be imposed on Minnesota.

"There is a false narrative that these rules are simply 'modeled' after California's," says Amber Backhaus, vice president of public affairs at MADA. "That is 100 percent false. Our rules have to be identical to theirs."

Second, the MPCA itself does not have the authority to make future rules via an "as amended" provision. While the rules were adopted "as amended," the MPCA claims to distinguish between "major" and "minor" amendments. Minor amendments made by CARB would be automatically adopted in Minnesota, but any major changes would have to proceed through the standard rulemaking process.

However, the MPCA has the sole decision-making power to determine what qualifies as a major or minor change.

"It gives unbridled discretion to agency officials to adopt or reject new rules without going through new rulemaking," Dickey says.

Third, Minnesota is unable to adopt

California's rules because the state does not qualify for a waiver from the Clean Air Act (CAA). Federal law requires uniformity in states' emissions regulations; California does not meet federal pollution standards, so the state was granted a waiver to enforce emissions rules stricter than those of the CAA.

However, Minnesota is fully compliant with the Act.

"There is not a single location in Minnesota that is not meeting federal air quality standards," says Dickey. "Minnesota simply doesn't have California problems."

Proponents of the California car rules point to a non-attainment plan in Eagan as proof of failure to meet the federal standards. But Eagan reached attainment status in 2015 — the plan just hasn't been abolished yet. And the city's non-attainment is related to lead, not air quality.

"If you're going to adopt a rule, it should relate to a problem that exists," Dickey says.

For MADA, this petition for declaratory judgment is just the latest step in a long fight against the California clean car rules.

"We've been fighting politically from the start," Lambert says. "It's been three long years."

They filed a federal lawsuit against the Walz administration in January 2021 to prevent the rules from being established, but the challenge was struck down as premature.

Now, MADA has asked the Court of Appeals to decide whether the adoption of these rules is permissible.

"Dealers are all in for the adoption of EVs and are making sizeable investments in their businesses to get ready for an expected increase in demand," Lambert said in a statement. "But they're making plans based on consumer appetite, not what California dictates." ★

—Grace Bureau



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Stop the Bleeding

Evaluating the Fed's post-COVID policies.

From January to June of this year, prices rose by 9.1 percent. It was the largest 12-month increase since the period ending November 1981 according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics — a spike in the Consumer Price Index not seen since Diana Ross and Lionel Richie topped the Billboard chart with their song “Endless Love” and *Raiders of the Lost Ark* was a box office smash.

But what caused this? A new book, *Trillion Dollar Triage: How Jay Powell and the Fed Battled a President and a Pandemic - and Prevented Economic Disaster*, by *The Wall Street Journal*'s chief economics correspondent Nick Timiraos, provides the answer.

First, Timiraos neatly summarizes the problem facing monetary policymak-

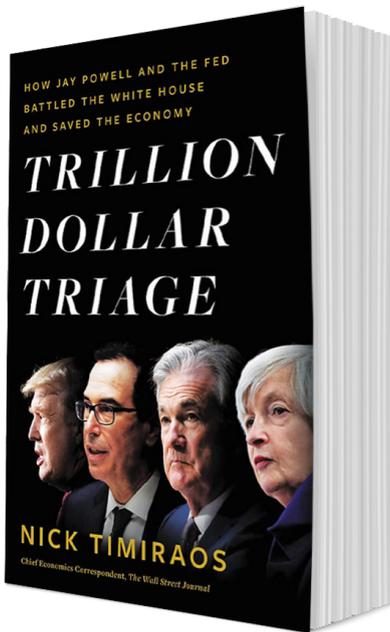
ers, led by Federal Reserve chair Jay Powell, when COVID-19 hit in early 2020. “The central bank can help boost demand when the economy slumps; there was no precedent for what policymakers would soon face — the equivalent of an economy placed into a medically induced coma.”

But while the situation was unprecedented, the Fed's response, in terms of the tools it used, was not: It printed money and bought assets. What was unprecedented was the scale. The Monetary Base increased by 49 percent from February to May 2020 as the Federal Reserve's balance sheet grew by 67 percent over the same period.

In 2008, when the Fed pumped liquidity into the financial system, financial

institutions largely sat on it, preventing much of the flow of capital from reaching the economy. This “sterilization” meant that the injection didn't cause a commensurately high rate of inflation. Timiraos explains how the Fed worked to make sure that this time the new money actually found its way into the economy. And it did: The broad M2 measure of the money supply increased by 41 percent between February 2020 and March 2022. It is changes in the money supply on this measure divided by real Gross Domestic Product that are closely correlated with the rate of inflation.

But with a tanking economy, the Fed shifted priorities away from keeping inflation in check. In August 2020, acting on an initiative of the previous year, Timiraos writes, “Powell was moving the Fed toward a new regime, dubbed ‘flexible average inflation targeting,’ or FAIT, that would allow for a period in which the committee, instead of aiming for two percent no matter what, would deliberately nudge inflation somewhat above two percent in some circumstances.”



As late as July 2021, when inflation hit 5.3 percent over the year, [Powell] was still arguing that surging inflation was “transitory.”

This reversed the move from discretionary to rules based monetary policy, which most central banks had adopted after the inflation of the 1970s. Responding to doubts that the Fed could raise inflation above two percent, Timiraos recalls, “Powell was unfazed. ‘I’m not at all concerned that people are saying, Oh, it’s not credible... It’ll be credible when we get inflation meaningfully above two percent for an extended period and we don’t react to it. We’ll just say, Look at that.’”

This explains why Powell stayed so sanguine for so long. As late as July 2021, when inflation hit 5.3 percent over the year, he was still arguing that surging inflation was “transitory.” The monetary base kept expanding until December 2021 when it was 86 percent larger than it had been in February 2020, and the Fed’s balance sheet continued growing until April 2022, by which time it was 115 percent bigger than in February 2020. Inflation has now been meaningfully “above two percent” since March 2021, to nobody’s obvious benefit. Indeed, in July 2022,

average inflation adjusted wages were lower than they were in June 2019.

This book is hero history. We learn that earlier in his career, Powell, “with a shock of silver in the middle of his dark hair... wielded a notable ability to dial down the pressure in a room.” Timiraos concludes that “Powell displayed speed and decisiveness at a time when much of the country was struggling with a bottomless pandemic and a president who refused to acknowledge reality.” This is central banking as Robert Ludlum potboiler.

Nevertheless, Powell emerges from this book looking something of a buffoon. “If inflation stays too high for too long (or if longer-term inflation expectations move up too much),” Timiraos writes, “the Fed may be forced to make a politically unsavory decision: raise rates....”

That is precisely where the Fed is now, stuck behind the eight ball. Timiraos ruefully notes that “the political hazards loom large in part because Powell placed such emphasis on promoting more inclusive growth. Going forward, the Fed may be exposed to critiques of racial insensitivity for raising rates.” Timiraos continues, paraphrasing and then quoting Warren Buffet: “Nobody knew exactly what the consequences would be of the Fed pumping so much credit into the system, said [Warren] Buffet. ‘But we do know the consequences of doing nothing... [T]he Fed then... did whatever it takes, squared, and we owe them a huge thank-you.’”

In fairness to Powell and others, the chaos of those early COVID-19 days should be remembered. But we are moving into a situation where we can begin to assess what the consequences were of the Fed pumping so much credit into the system. A reckoning of costs against benefits in monetary policy, as in other areas, is coming due. A disaster may not have been prevented, only postponed. ★

—John Phelan



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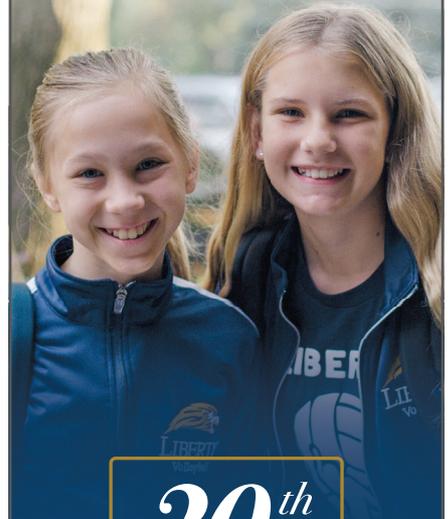
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Framing the 2022 Election

The main issues to keep in mind when heading to the polls.

What issues are driving voters to the polls? That's the most important question in every election. The candidates don't get to decide this question, but they can influence the answer through what's known as "framing" the election.

If Minnesota voters walk into the polls this November to voice their frustration with inflation and crime, Republicans will come out on top. If voters go to the polls to react to the U.S. Supreme Court's recent abortion decision, Democrats will win. Both sides are using their press releases, advertising budgets and Twitter accounts to "frame" the election in the most favorable way for their candidates. But voters always have the last word.

Since *Thinking Minnesota* subscribers are also very likely voters, here is a brief rundown of the issues and where each party stands in 2022.

Inflation

Gov. Tim Walz is correct, governors don't have much influence on inflation, but he unfortunately shares a party label with President Joe Biden, who many voters are blaming for higher prices on food, clothing and almost everything else they purchase. The cost of driving is one area where the Walz administration has made an impact. Walz proposed to raise the gas tax and adopt the Low Carbon Fuel Standard (LCFS) that would directly

raise the price of a gallon of gas. He went around the legislature to adopt California's emission standards, forcing Minnesota car dealers to fill their lots with electric cars, ignoring market demand. The result: higher prices for all cars sold in the state.

Crime

If voters head to the polls to voice their frustration over rising crime in Minnesota, Scott Jensen and Republicans will win in a landslide. Jensen and his allies have focused on Walz's failure during the 2020 riots when he froze for two days before finally calling in the National Guard to quell the unrest. Two years later, Minnesota is still suffering under a sense of lawlessness, and we are now officially a high crime state according to FBI and Bureau of Criminal Apprehension data. Walz is trying to deflect by blaming the legislature for not passing a \$300 million crime prevention package, but more than anything he just wants to change the subject. If crime is the issue, Walz loses.

Education

Education policy is always a top issue in statewide campaigns, and this year it's probably the fourth most important issue for voters. Jensen has a 10-point plan for schools that includes a strong school choice provision with state money following the student to the school of their choice. He also proposes a Parents' Bill of Rights, a focus on reading by the third grade, and keeping divisive topics out of curricula. Walz is promising to "fully fund education," which has proved to be a moving target with local school districts awarding teacher contracts they can't afford (see: Minneapolis teacher strike). The candidates and parties offer stark differences for Minnesotans planning to make education their top reason for voting.

Taxes and spending

Taxes and spending are always on the mind of voters to some degree. This year, the state is sitting on \$9.3 billion in excess funds after the legislature failed to reach any agreements in the 2022 session. Jensen proposed eliminating the income tax

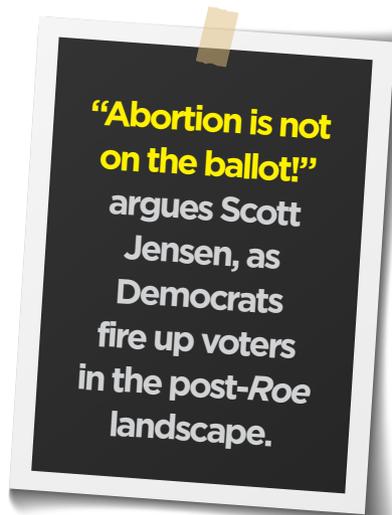


"Governors have nothing to do with inflation!"
says
Gov. Tim Walz,
as he defends his record against Republican attacks.

entirely, a bold proposal considering the income tax accounts for 36.7 percent of our revenue. Critics immediately focused on the revenue side, unable to imagine Minnesota surviving any spending cuts, even though we rank fourth in the nation in per capita welfare spending. In fact, if Minnesota lowered welfare spending to the national average, we could eliminate the need for most of the income taxes collected each year. Walz is reminding voters he signed into law two separate income tax cuts.

Abortion

The recent U.S. Supreme Court decision overturning *Roe v. Wade* has elevated abortion to a top issue in the 2022 campaign, especially for voters who support legal abortion. Voters have been using abortion as a litmus test for



candidates in every election since *Roe* was decided in 1974. Jensen is trying hard to convince abortion rights supporters that Minnesota's Supreme Court settled the issue with their *Doe v. Gomez* decision in 1994. While true, it's

a tough sell. Walz and his allies are putting a lot of resources behind this issue to rally their base into believing abortion rights will be in jeopardy if Jensen and Republicans are elected. Voters who care about abortion (for and against) have a very clear choice in the 2022 election for governor.

Historically, Minnesota has one of the highest voter turnouts in the nation. To some extent, every campaign — no matter the political party — depends on making sure its base goes to the polls. This year, however, there are a variety of issues, from crime to inflation and education, that have cut across party lines. It will be up to individuals making the best choices for themselves and their families who will ultimately decide who has the privilege to lead the state for the next four years. ★

—Bill Walsh

It's official:
Minnesota
is a high
crime state

Source: FBI Data

HighCrimeMN.com

AMERICAN
EXPERIMENT

Leaving for Good

Educators continue to leave the teachers' union.

Thousands of Minnesota educators have let Education Minnesota know it doesn't represent their values by opting out of union membership.

Until 2018, financially supporting the state teachers' union and its local and national affiliates was required in order for educators to keep their job. Given that is no longer the case, educators are exercising their right to exit the union as its priorities become more focused on politics and partisan agendas.

Almost two percent

According to Education Minnesota's most recent federal LM-2 report, the union lost more than 2,700 members from 2019 to 2020. That's almost two percent of its membership in just one school year and follows the loss of membership in its national affiliates — the National Education Association (2.3 percent) and the American Federation of Teachers (2.1 percent).

Out of the \$32 million Education Minnesota brought in through dues, only \$10.4 million was spent on representational activities. Nearly \$3.4 million went toward what the union self-identifies as "political activities and lobbying," which is separate from the union's PAC spending. The National Education Association spent more than *double* on political activities and lobbying than on representational activities (nearly \$66 million compared to \$32 million).

It's a personal decision

Educators have shared with American Experiment's Educated Teachers MN project that they decided to opt out of union membership for a variety of

reasons — from feeling that the union is too focused on adults instead of students to feeling the union spends too much money on a national political agenda.

Regardless of the reason, true support for teachers must include respect for their personal choices regarding union membership. Just as educators encourage their students to be independent thinkers and hold true to themselves, so too should educators be trusted by their colleagues to make decisions that are best for them and their families.

"Free riders"

Unfortunately, this doesn't stop union members from disparaging their colleagues and resorting to name-calling.

Teachers are in the education field because of their desire to serve others, which makes "free rider" accusations so disappointing. And because these accusations stem from misleading messaging, they are completely disingenuous.

Public-sector unions fought for — and won — the right to represent all

employees within their bargaining unit, regardless of union membership status. Because government unions have exclusive representation rights as a matter of law, they collectively bargain on behalf of both members and nonmembers. This exclusive representative relationship and the collective bargaining framework have not been evaluated in Minnesota by public employees or lawmakers since their formal enactment in 1971.

The union could lobby to change the long-standing statutory right of unions to exclusively represent all employees in a bargaining unit. If unions wish to maintain the monopolistic privilege of exclusive agency, they create the "free rider" claims so often complained about.

Educators cannot choose to belong only to the local union, which deals with most of the representational and collective bargaining activities. A popular solution for educators who have resigned from union membership is to send a voluntary donation to the local association. This solves the "free rider" problem and keeps the money local.

Instead of assuming the worst in our civil servants by calling them "free riders," shouldn't unions ask themselves why these public employees are looking for an exit? ★

—Catrin Wigfall

Options for Minnesota Teachers

Educated Teachers MN seeks to inform and empower teachers by offering them educational material to evaluate their exclusive representative relationship with the national and state teachers' unions, how dues are being spent and consider alternatives to membership in the union. Informed and empowered teachers are more likely to enjoy teaching and better suited to serve the needs of students. Educated Teachers MN is a project of Center of the American Experiment. The website is found at www.EducatedTeachersMN.com.



Unions



Nurses Boot-out the Union

Nurses working at Mayo Clinic Health systems vote to oust the union.

A majority of the more than 400 registered nurses at the Mayo Clinic Health System in Mankato voted on July 26 to do away with union membership by decertifying the Minnesota Nurses Association (MNA). The election outcome abruptly removes nearly half of the 950 registered nurses in the Mayo system who belong to the union from MNA's rolls.

The vote came six weeks after a nurse filed a union decertification petition with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) and amounts to a serious setback for the MNA. According to *Minnesota Reformer's* Max Nesterak, "Nurses at the Mayo Clinic's Mankato hospital voted 213 to 181 to decertify their union on Monday in a significant blow to Minnesota's powerful nurses' union, and a victory for anti-union activists who have focused their efforts on health care workers."

It's not clear whether a single issue drove the decertification effort. The

nurses behind the effort to oust the union were supported in their campaign by the National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation, a group that provides free services to workers fighting compulsory union membership.

"We are proud to have helped Mayo Clinic nurses exercise their right to free themselves of an unwanted union," National Right to Work president Mark Mix said in a statement. "MNA union bosses should respect the result of the nurses' vote and its clear rejection of their so-called 'representation.'"

This was followed by nurses at another Mayo hospital in southern Minnesota voting to end union representation in their workplace. The latest decertification vote held under the auspices of the NLRB at the St. James Mayo hospital wasn't close, with nurses deciding 15-2 to toss out the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME).

Word of the lopsided decision came in a news release from the National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation that also assisted the St. James nurses in making their case. "The workers' decertification petition was filed by registered nurse Heather Youngwirth with the NLRB Region 18 office in Minneapolis with free legal representation from National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation staff attorneys."

"While these nurses have successfully removed a union they oppose, we should not lose sight that thousands of Minnesota workers are forced to pay union dues, not because they voluntarily choose to, but because they would be

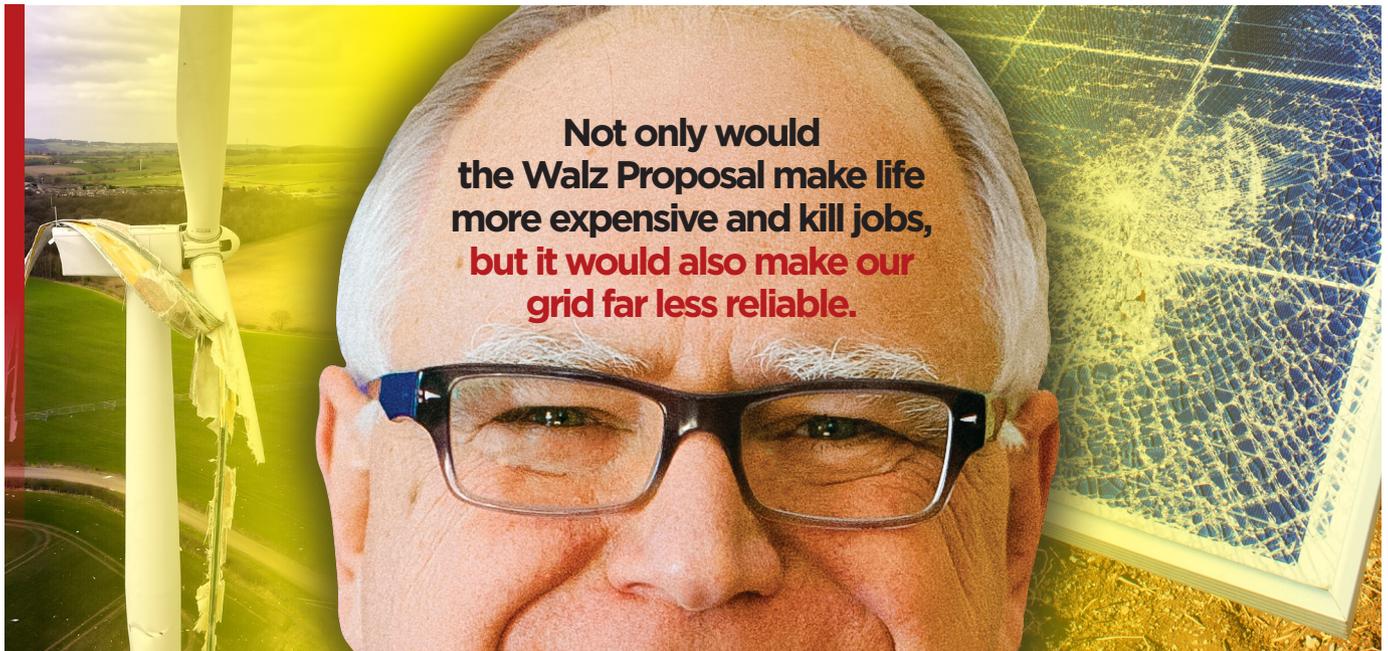
"We are proud to have helped Mayo Clinic nurses exercise their right to free themselves of an unwanted union."

**—Mark Mix,
National Right to Work Legal
Defense Foundation**

fired if they don't pay up," commented Mix. "It is past time Minnesota joins all of its neighboring states and ensures Minnesota workers have Right to Work protections so all workers can decide for themselves whether to financially support union activities."

Meantime, dozens of employees at two bargaining units of the Cuyuna Regional Medical Center in north central Minnesota have filed for decertification votes, as well. The National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation has a history of involvement in Minnesota, including a role in supporting the childcare providers who overwhelmingly defeated an attempt to form a statewide union in 2016. ★

—Tom Steward



Walzifornia II: Electric Boogaloo

How Gov. Walz's plan for 100 percent carbon-free electricity by 2040 is untenable and irresponsible.

Minnesota sits at an energy crossroads.

We can either continue to make our electricity more expensive and less reliable by increasing our reliance upon wind turbines, solar panels, and battery storage, or we can correct course and focus on providing reliable, affordable electricity to the families and businesses that rely upon it, while seeking cost-effective ways to improve environmental outcomes.

Unfortunately, it appears Gov. Tim Walz will pursue the first option, as detailed in American Experiment's new report, "The High Cost of Carbon-Free Electricity by 2040: How Governor Walz's Plan Would Cost Minnesota \$313 Billion Through 2050 and Lead to Blackouts."

In January 2021, Walz announced his intention to lobby the legislature to pass a law mandating that 100 percent of Minnesota's electricity comes from carbon-free resources by 2040. Importantly, the Walz Proposal does not legalize the construction of new nuclear power plants, and his proposal does not include as "carbon-free" the electricity generated by large hydroelectric dams in Canada that Minnesotans already buy.

As a result, the Walz Proposal is effectively a wind, solar, and battery storage mandate, a policy that will cause electricity prices to increase substantially and reduce the reliability of the grid.

The costs of attempting to power our modern lives with unreliable wind and solar resources is jaw dropping. Ameri-

can Experiment determined it would cost Minnesota families and businesses an additional \$313.2 billion (in constant 2022 dollars) through 2050, compared to operating the current electric grid. This sticks the average Minnesota household with an additional \$4,890 price tag per year, *every year*, through 2050.

These crippling cost increases aren't just driven by higher electricity costs at home. Inflation adds to it exponentially as higher energy prices cause businesses to raise prices on goods and services to make up for higher overhead costs. This is an inescapable, economy-wide effect. When energy becomes more expensive, *everything else* becomes more expensive, which is why the Walz Proposal would be devastating for our economy.

The higher energy prices would also mean massive job losses. Using the economic modeling software IMPLAN, American Experiment determined these higher electricity prices would destroy nearly 79,000 jobs in our state. These losses would likely be concentrated in energy intensive industries like manufacturing and mining — which are some of

the best family-supporting jobs in the state, especially in Greater Minnesota.

Not only would the Walz Proposal make life more expensive and kill jobs, but it would also make our grid far less reliable. American Experiment determined that the mix of wind turbines, solar panels, and battery storage facilities would result in capacity shortfalls — otherwise known as blackouts — in two of the three years studied, based on real-life wind and solar productivity data obtained from the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

Alarming, if wind and solar output were the same as they were in 2020, Minnesota would experience a 55-hour blackout in late January, which is shown in red in the graph nearby.

This “below zero blackout” is caused by wind output dropping to below 10 percent of its potential output for 82 hours straight. Of those 82 hours, 42 straight hours saw wind capacity factors below 1.5 percent. Additionally, solar capacity factors never exceed 25 percent during the duration of the capacity shortfall.

Relatively short blackouts ranging

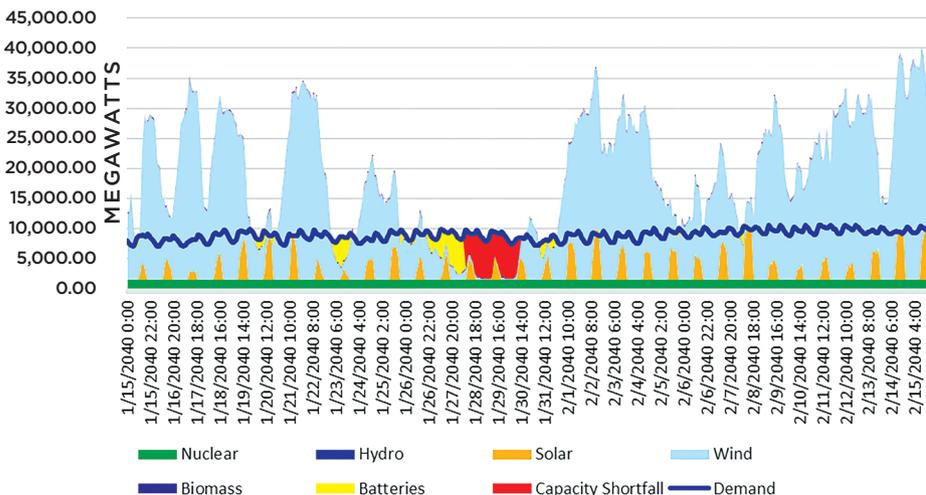
from four to six hours are economically damaging, but long sustained blackouts like the one illustrated are absolutely devastating. A 55-hour blackout in January would be nothing short of catastrophic in Minnesota.

Furnaces would stop working because the blower fans that circulate the warm air are powered by electricity. Water pipes would freeze, and hundreds, if not thousands, of people could die from carbon monoxide poisoning if they use dangerous alternative heat sources as they attempt to keep warm, as occurred in Texas during the blackouts of 2021.

In the end, the idea that we can run our electric grid on wind turbines, solar panels, and batteries is a dangerous and unserious one. If policymakers keep insisting that climate change is an existential crisis, they should look to options such as the legalization of nuclear power plants in Minnesota — which would reduce the cost of lowering emissions by \$224 billion compared to the Walz Proposal. Otherwise, it is impossible to take them seriously. ★

—Isaac Orr & Mitch Rolling

Walz Proposal Hourly Electricity Supply 1/15/2040-2/15/2040: 2021 Demand and 2020 Capacity Factors



Source: Center of the American Experiment



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—John Hinderaker

President,
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CHARLES STENVIG: THE MAKING OF A MAYOR

The legacy of the
policeman turned
mayor who fought
Minneapolis crime
and establishment
politicians.

By John Phelan

It wasn't supposed to happen. On June 11, 1969, the *Minneapolis Tribune* reported, "Charles Stenvig, a political independent and a police detective, completed a surprising drive to power by defeating Republican Dan Cohen Tuesday to win election as mayor of Minneapolis." The *Tribune* continued, "Stenvig, 41, overwhelmed Cohen, who is president of the City Council... The Stenvig share of the votes was 61.8 percent."

Stenvig, the *Tribune* explained, "ran an unconventional campaign that consisted of virtually no media advertising and that relied heavily on personal contacts by the candidate. He cruised the city in a 1940 sound truck and attempted to blanket all wards with lawn signs... He had no paid staff." His campaign "reported donations of \$14,971 and disbursements of \$7,997 and unpaid obligations of \$3,314." Cohen's campaign, meanwhile, "showed expenditures of \$36,797" and "was headed by five paid staffers, including... a campaign consultant from Washington, D.C." Stenvig's opponent "advertised widely in the broadcast media and on billboards" and was endorsed by "President Nixon, Minnesota Gov. Harold LeVander and a committee of city DFLers."

It wasn't supposed to happen. So how did it?

Mayor Stenvig, left of center, with Police Chief Basil Lutz, Deputy Chief Gordon Johnson, and school Superintendent Dr. John B. Davis, among others, 1969.

Minneapolis in the 1960s

By 1969, Arthur Naftalin had served as mayor of Minneapolis for eight years. A former professor at the University of Minnesota, Naftalin exemplified the liberal ideology of governance, as academics Jeffrey T. Manuel and Andrew Urban — authors of a study on Stenvig’s political and policing philosophy — define it, “was to use social science and technology to shape the city and its population.”

But many Minneapolitans were losing faith in this creed for one main reason: crime. Between 1960 and 1969, Minnesota’s population increased by seven percent but murders rose by 90 percent, robberies by 220 percent, aggravated assaults by 436 percent, and rapes by 451 percent. Much of this was concentrated in the Twin Cities, and working class residents were disproportionately affected. In 1968, “lawbreaking” in Minneapolis rose 16 percent from the previous year. In two months in 1969, south Minneapolis, comprising just six percent of the city’s land area, accounted for 26 percent of its street crimes. Betty Wood, a housewife, told the *Tribune* that her family was “carr[ying] guns from fear of crime.”

The issue of crime was mixed with that of race. In 1950, less than two percent of Minneapolis residents were black. That rose to eight percent in 1960 but blacks accounted for 21 percent of all arrests. A city report called for formal mechanisms for civilian complaints regarding police prejudice and brutality, the hiring of black officers, and the establishment of a civilian oversight body. This was defeated, but an increasingly common complaint was that liberal policies were preventing the police from maintaining law and order. A letter in the *Tribune* said: “It seems that [Naftalin’s] administration has created a legion of untouchables and no warrant can be served, regardless of the seriousness of the

crime, because of interference from high authority.”

While the rest of the country was rocked by race riots in the latter half of the 1960s, Minnesota had escaped the violence. Senator Walter Mondale boasted to his colleagues, “No such thing could happen in Minnesota.” But the peaceful bubble burst in July 1967. In *Minneapolis: An Urban Biography*, Tom Weber explains:

On July 19th, an argument broke out during Minneapolis’s Aquatennial Torchlight Parade, which led to accusations that a black woman had been mistreated. As a crowd of African Americans walking up from the parade site converged on Plymouth Avenue, violence erupted. Someone set the Knox Food Market, a Jewish business, on fire, and someone threw Molotov cocktails at the home of the local alderman.

[Community leaders] encouraged Naftalin not to have the police sweep the street. The National Guard was called in to maintain order but also to be a calmer force than the city’s own cops, many of whom wanted to take a harder line. After sporadic incidents the second night, a peaceful dance held at The Way helped calm the neighborhood enough to end the unrest. No one died, but several people were injured and several businesses, many Jewish owned, were vandalized or destroyed.

The riots were a blow to Minnesota’s self-image, and two years later Naftalin decided not to run again. Charles Stenvig made his move.

Chuck

Stenvig was born in Minneapolis in 1928 and grew up on the south side of the city. He attended Roosevelt High where he won a Minnesota state high school boys’ golf championship, then served in the Army. With his G.I. Bill benefits, he attended Augsburg College and graduated

with a college degree, he was ambivalent about “book learning.” “My mother said one of us kids had to go to college, and I was it,” he explained. “So I got done in three years, got [out] of there fast.” He joined the Minneapolis Police Department as a patrolman, made detective in 1964, and was elected president of the police federation in 1966. He was a militant in his methods and in his political activism in defense of the police: In 1967, he led a march on City Hall demanding higher wages, even blocking the building’s entry and exit. When the sheriff’s department moved to break the ongoing blockade weeks later, Stenvig threatened, “I don’t know who you are but you are going to get your head knocked.”

1969 – Crime

To Stenvig, “experts” like Naftalin were destroying Minneapolis and people with practical experience were needed to save it. “People are sick and tired of politicians and intellectuals,” he said. “They want an average workingman from the community to represent them — and that’s me.”

Stenvig could boast of his front line experience battling crime. He promised to “stop it before it starts” by utilizing proactive policing and not “wait for burning and looting.” A popular campaign slogan at the time was “Take the Handcuffs of the Police.”

Accusations of racism followed. Cohen called Stenvig “nothing more than George Wallace in Minneapolis clothes” and accused him of peddling “a thinly veiled kind of racism.” Stenvig worked hard to neutralize this, declining Wallace’s offer to campaign with him, saying, “Both George Wallace and I believe in strict law enforcement...but after that our views separate.” In his inaugural speech, he proclaimed, “Color should not be a cause of harassment, not a shield from wrongdoing.” This colorblind approach to public safety proved popular.

Class, not race, was Stenvig’s stock-in-trade, and wealthy white liberals were his favorite target, whether they were on campus or in the suburbs. Speaking of the periodic riots at the



(Right): Members of the Minnesota National Guard patrol Plymouth Ave. in Minneapolis following riots in 1967. (Left): The remains of several buildings on Plymouth Ave.

University of Minnesota, Stenvig said, “I’ve seen those demonstrators and I’ve sometimes had to look awfully hard for a black American among them.” The students responded with an editorial in the *Minnesota Daily*, the university’s newspaper, describing Stenvig’s victory as a triumph of “a shallow brand of law-and-order” over the “intelligent leadership of Arthur Naftalin.”

Stenvig went further, attacking “the power structure from Wayzata” who were “afraid they’ll have a working man as mayor.” John Cowles, Jr., publisher of Minneapolis’s two major newspapers, was a particular target. Of the *Minneapolis Star*, Stenvig told the League of Women Voters, “you know what Star spells backwards.” Again, the press pushed back, but his campaign manager, Milton Bix, argued that, “the majority of the people in Minneapolis do not follow the editorial policy of the *Star* and *Tribune*... the people view the paper as a tool of the power interest in Minneapolis. The people wanted someone to represent them. A number of people told us they would have not voted for Stenvig had the paper not endorsed Dan Cohen.”

Stenvig’s style and populism proved especially appealing to blue collar Minneapolisians. An analysis in the

Tribune noted that Stenvig “attracted voters who have not participated in Minneapolis elections for many years.” It went on: “In overwhelmingly Republican precincts, Stenvig ran considerably behind Naftalin, but in those with the strongest DFL allegiance, he almost equaled the mayor’s totals... The strongest DFL neighborhoods gave Stenvig 66 to 74 percent of their vote.” Stenvig “received 50 percent of the vote in precincts of higher-than-average income, 68 percent where the income level was average or below.” He received 70 percent of all union ballots.

Stenvig’s victory surprised Minnesota’s political Babbitts like Mondale. One reporter noted that Minneapolis’s political experts “couldn’t believe law and order [was] a viable issue in [Minneapolis] and a state where civil and human rights organizations, religious and secular, multiply and feed on each other.”

1971 – Schools

Stenvig went into the 1971 election with an 85 percent approval rating, but his opponent, the DFL’s Harry Davis and the first black candidate for the office, had substantial backing from the Minneapolis business community and comfortably outspent his opponents.

But Davis sat on the school board, which had recently adopted a plan to desegregate the city’s schools by “pairing” economically similar and contiguous neighborhood schools. Polls found 87 percent of Twin Cities residents believed that interracial mixing at school



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produced benefits, but they also found that the favored methods were “magnet schools” or one-way busing, bringing black students to majority white schools. “Pairing” was the least popular option — 62 percent opposed it — and infuriated Stenvig’s working class base: It was their schools, not those of Davis’s well-off backers, to be scheduled for integration first. One school board meeting drew so much interest that it lasted from 5 p.m. to 5 a.m.

Stenvig’s argument from 1969 had fresh appeal: Intellectual and economic elites were imposing policies on others without having to bear the costs. A labor leader explained, “The guy next door [who] works like a dog all day...comes home and worries all night — taxes, mortgages, wages, the whole bit. So he picks up a paper or he watches TV and there’s some big shot telling him what to do. Quite frankly he resented it.”

Because of the appeal of Stenvig’s argument and intense pressure from their members, labor unions officially backed a non-DFL candidate for the first time. The United Auto Workers were the only major union not to: They remained neutral.

At the end of an ugly racially charged campaign, Stenvig was reelected with 71 percent of the vote. His supporters, organized as the “T Party,” won their school board elections. Newly elected members Marilyn Borea and Philip Olson said, “We feel the unheard voice of the public is now heard.”

Downfall

Getting elected was one thing, governing was another, and Stenvig faced bitter opposition from

Republicans who held 10 of the council’s 13 seats. “Almost no programs emanate from Stenvig’s walnut-paneled suite,” one reporter noted, with the mayor vetoing almost every bill presented by the council. A Republican councilor complained, “I don’t think Stenvig is even trying to provide leadership in the traditional sense,” instead he was “acting as a spokesman for what’s called the Silent Majority.” Stenvig insisted that these vetoes were “affirmative” because “the people have had it up to here with government and it was time to put a stop to it.”

With the city council keeping a tight rein on his political agenda, Stenvig indulged his flair for stunts. He pushed the Minneapolis public library to remove publications such as *Rolling Stone*, *Black Panther*, and *New Left Notes* because they advocated drug use, disrespect for authority figures, and violence against the police. He eliminated any external oversight of the police department, including an early incarnation of the Civilian Review Commission. He was also mired in scandal when attempts to leverage his office for financial reward, whether legal or illegal, came to light. Minneapolisians began to sour on him.

Meanwhile, the alliance of the business community, wealthier voters, minority voters, and the DFL — which had been the basis of Harry Davis’s candidacy — persisted. The Republican Party withered. Meanwhile, many of Stenvig’s white, working class base were moving to the suburbs: Minneapolis’s population fell by 14 percent during the 1970s. Even the police federation was changing. In 1973, Stenvig ran for office without the

endorsement of the police federation for the first time, partly because new, college-educated officers rejected his approach. To Donald Dwyer, who briefly served as police chief, Stenvig represented “the old, historical hard-nosed cop versus quite a lot of idealism in a younger, far better educated group who are disenchanting with the present administration.” Stenvig was defeated by the DFL’s Albert Hofstede.

Stenvig didn’t receive lucrative employment offers when he left office, so he went back on the beat until he ran and was reelected mayor in 1975. However, Hofstede beat him again in 1977, and in 1979 he was defeated by Don Fraser.

Historian Jeffrey Bloodworth wrote in his book *Losing the Center: The Decline of American Liberalism, 1968-1992*, *From the time of his 1971 reelection, Stenvig engaged in a series of outlandish political theatrics that undermined his movement... He could have reoriented DFL liberalism back toward its working class roots or moved these voters into the GOP’s ranks. Instead, he self-destructed. As a result, New Politics liberals in Minnesota were spared any substantial soul searching. Freed from this, they dismissed the Stenvig phenomenon as a meaningless product of personality and circumstance.*

After his 1979 defeat, Stenvig made a bid to become ambassador to Norway in 1980, citing his “100 percent Norwegian” heritage. He also appeared on the television game show *Family Feud*. In 1982 he ran for Hennepin County Sheriff and lost. He moved to Sun City, Ariz., in the late 1980s where he struggled to find anyone to play golf with because “he was too good and no one wanted to take him on,” his son explained. His hometown tried to forget him but his reputation for law and order and loyalty to his working-class roots persisted. In 1993, Lori Sturdevant noted in the *Star Tribune* that the “mention of that name — Charlie Stenvig — still sends a shudder through the city’s progressive hearts.” Stenvig died in 2010 at age 82. He remains the last non-DFL mayor of Minneapolis. ★



EDUCATION

‘EQUITY 2030’ HIGHER ED’S BRAVE NEW WORLD

Minn State’s new system-wide equity goal undermines its aim of providing a quality education.

BY KATHERINE KERSTEN



The Minnesota State College and University System — our state’s largest higher education system, with 54 campuses — is embarking on a radical experiment. It has adopted a new plan, “Equity 2030,” to “eliminate” all academic gaps among students of different racial and ethnic groups by 2030. The plan will make balancing outcomes by skin color, not academic excellence and enhanced student learning, the system’s #1 priority.

Equity 2030’s fundamental premise is that students are not responsible for their own educational success. If they fail, the fault lies entirely with racist teachers. Going forward, Minn State faculty must find a way to engineer identical outcomes among all demographic groups. Those who don’t risk being

labeled racist or could face daunting job consequences.

Minn State’s sweeping new “equity” agenda will have widespread impact and threatens to undermine the quality of education at all its institutions. The system’s seven universities and 26 community and technical colleges, which include Metropolitan State University, St. Cloud State University and Hennepin Technical College, offer courses of study from post-graduate degrees to welding and auto mechanics. About one-third of its students are members of minority groups.

The “Equity 2030” crusade is a project of Chancellor Devinder Malhotra and his Office of Equity and Inclusion. The plan requires institutions to achieve absolute “parity” in group outcomes on measures ranging from “course success” and retention rates, to post-graduate outcomes, to participation in honors programs and high-demand majors.

This will be a monumental challenge. Today, in Minnesota and across the nation, massive academic differentials exist between students of different races and ethnicities in reading and math performance, with black, Hispanic and American Indian groups, on average, lagging well behind whites and Asians.

“The fact is, many of our students lack basic knowledge,” explains one Minn State faculty member. “Some students in our science and math courses can’t add decimals, work with fractions, or read charts and graphs. Some in our English courses can’t write a coherent paragraph.”

So why have Minn State authorities publicly committed to erasing all group differentials in academic achievement? Because they believe the gaps’ sole cause is white racism, which they intend to root out across the system.

“Institutional racism,” declares the Office of Equity and Inclusion’s “Equity by Design Campus Team Toolkit,” “is an entrenched characteristic of colleges and universities that has to be dismantled with strategies that are color

conscious, informed by critical race theory and systemic.”

Minn State’s equity agenda will require a top-to-bottom audit across the system, under the watchful eye of Equity and Inclusion bureaucrats. “We recognize” that achieving equity will “require new institutional structures,” “cultures,” “practices” and “routines,” the Toolkit declares. The aim is to “apply a magnifying glass” to “intentionally rethink” how the system operates “day-to-day.”

Many faculty members are concerned that the Equity 2030 plan is deeply misconceived, and over time will seriously erode educational quality.

“Teachers want to help all students — that’s why we’re here,” a faculty member explains. “But the administration has given us no evidence this ‘equity’ approach has worked to improve student learning anywhere, and

**Equity 2030’s
fundamental premise
is that students are
not responsible
for their own
educational success.**

they’ve provided us no tools to do it.”

“The truth is, there’s nothing about actually improving student learning in this plan,” he adds. “It’s all about getting the numbers right on paper.”

He concludes with an obvious question: “In the future, will I have to give a proportional number of A’s, B’s, C’s and F’s to each racial group in my classes?”

Equity 2030’s real agenda appears to be entrenching Equity and Inclusion apparatchiks and their allies as a permanent linchpin power on campus. The plan’s goal is utopian: Equity will not be achieved until “data show *no*



MINNESOTA STATE
Office of Equity and Inclusion



Equity by Design Campus Team Toolkit

Minnesota State Colleges & Universities

Josefina Landrieu - Priyank Shah - Tarrence Robertson

The Equity Toolkit, which aims to “intentionally rethink” the way Minn State colleges and universities operate.

disparities in educational outcomes... at *all levels of an institution*” (emphasis added).

Remarkably, this revolution, which will profoundly alter the system’s mission, is being imposed across the 54 Minn State campuses without consideration or approval by the Minnesota Legislature, which represents taxpayers who underwrite the system to the tune of more than \$2 billion a year.

The ideology behind Equity 2030

“Equity,” as Minn State uses the term, does not have its common sense meaning of “fairness.” It means the opposite — “the proportional distribution of desirable outcomes” across demographic groups, in the

words of the Equity by Design Toolkit.

Equity is not to be confused with “equality,” which is “equal treatment,” whereas “equity refers to outcomes,” according to the Toolkit. Indeed, equal treatment may even be “detrimental to equitable outcomes.”

As any parent can tell you, it’s impossible to dictate identical academic outcomes, even among the children of one family. But Minn State’s utopian plan faces a particularly sobering reality: In 2021, 63 percent of our state’s white and 62 percent of Asian high school students could read at grade level, among those who took the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments. For black,

Hispanic, and American Indian students, the figures were 36 percent, 37 percent, and 29 percent, respectively.

Parity will be even harder to achieve at institutions like Normandale Community College (which has committed to attain “equity” by 2025) and Southwest Minnesota State University in Marshall, which have many high school-aged Post-Secondary Enrollment Options (PSEO) students. These students are disproportionately white and tend to have stronger academic backgrounds than degree-seeking students, on average.

So how does Minn State’s Office of Equity and Inclusion propose to erase these long-standing academic differentials in just a few semesters of college?

One way, of course, is to lower or eliminate academic standards, so that grades are no longer awarded on the actual quality of a student’s performance. That’s what Minneapolis

public high schools have done in their quest for “equity.”

In 2020, for example, at Roosevelt High School, black students’ graduation rate was 77 percent, but only 23 percent were proficient in reading and 10 percent in math, among those who took state tests in 2019. Hispanic students’ graduation rate was 74 percent, but a mere 17 percent of those tested in 2019 were proficient in reading and 18 percent in math.



The Office of Equity
and Inclusion **will**
oversee creation
of Minn State’s brave
new world.

“Equity” — *equal outcomes* — has been achieved on paper, but at a devastating cost: A high school diploma has become essentially meaningless as schools graduate kids sorely lacking in the necessary skills they need to be successful adults.

“Equity-mindedness” versus “deficit- mindedness”

The theory behind Equity 2030 is, at base, the brainchild of one woman: Estela Bensimon of the University of Southern California, according to the Equity by Design Toolkit. It is based on the assumption — wholly unsubstantiated by reality — that all people, by nature, will perform the



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.

same, unless artificial barriers erected by hostile groups prevent them.

Bensimon, and the Equity 2030 plan, maintain that what creates these unjust, racist barriers, and so produces all demographic academic gaps, is “whiteness,” which the Toolkit never defines. Racism is said to take several forms, including “cultural” (“the idea that behaviors and values associated with white people” are “automatically better or more normal”) and “structural” (“the normalization and legitimation of an array of dynamics... that routinely advantage Whites” throughout “the entire social fabric”).

Only white people can be racist, the Toolkit maintains, because only they have the “power” to impose their biases on others.

To eradicate white racism, according to the Toolkit, all Minn State personnel must reorient the way they perceive reality by moving from a “deficit mindset” to an “equity mindset.” A “deficit-minded” educator “blames students” for their lack of academic success by viewing racial disparities as a function of the students’ own shortcomings, including lack of “proficiency” or “preparedness” to learn, in the Toolkit’s words.

An “equity mindset,” by contrast, maintains that poor student performance is entirely the fault of discriminatory teachers and schools. Students’ academic preparation, ability, and study habits are said to play no role in outcomes, which are wholly attributed to racism.

Equity 2030 forbids the use of so-called “deficit-minded phrases” to explain student failure. Examples of phrases deemed problematic include, “students don’t come here prepared” or “aren’t studying in the right ways or studying enough.” The Toolkit declares that Minn State can eliminate student performance gaps on every measure if all personnel make three “equity-minded” commitments:

- To move from “college-ready students” to “student-ready” colleges;
- To shift accountability to the institution rather than to the students; and
- To be “color-conscious,” not “color-blind.”

System authorities emphasize that total buy-in to the Equity 2030 plan is “critical” to the campaign’s success. For Minn State personnel, dissent is not an option.

Equity teams and how they operate

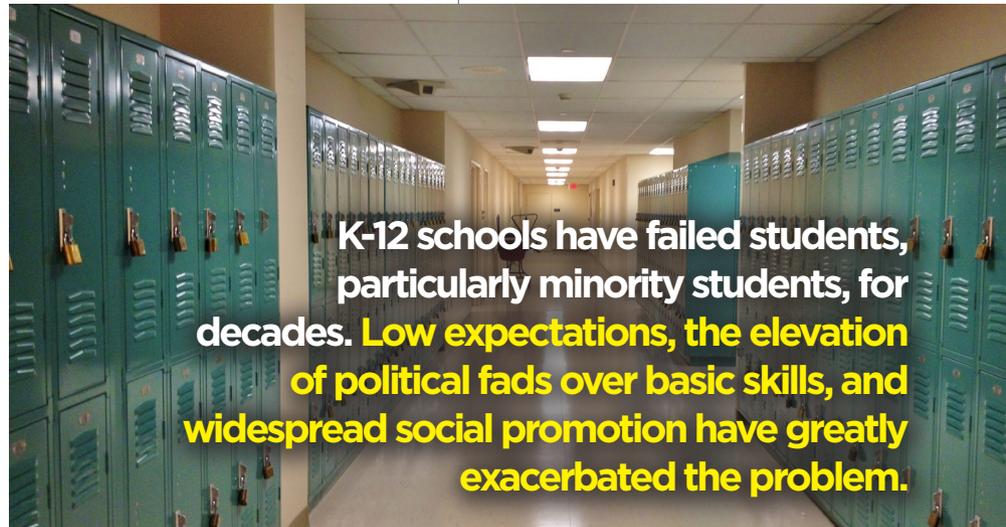
The Office of Equity and Inclusion will oversee creation of Minn State’s brave new world. The Toolkit recommends that each institution name a team of “change agents” — six to 10 administrators, faculty, students and others — who will advise institutional leaders and build a campus equity “coalition.”

The equity teams, backed by the chancellor’s office, have “discretion and latitude” to “conduct a deep dive into identifying equity gaps,” and

a “difficult,” time-consuming process, and “you will likely get uncomfortable.” They are pressured to confess their personal “biases” — i.e., to “be open to seeing...your own privilege (especially for those who hold the privilege of whiteness and able-bodiedness),” as well as their ignorance of “the history of race and racism.”

With consciousness thus raised, they are prepared to “assess their own racialized assumptions” and “practices,” and, finally, to commit to assuming “responsibility” for the success of marginalized student groups.

Equity and Inclusion trainers emphasize that, paradoxically, “whiteness” and racism — though toxic and pervasive — take forms today that are largely invisible. (How could



K-12 schools have failed students, particularly minority students, for decades. Low expectations, the elevation of political fads over basic skills, and widespread social promotion have greatly exacerbated the problem.

to recommend changes designed to eliminate racist barriers. The timeline is not clear, and Minn State institutions are at different stages of implementation.

The teams’ extensive “orientation” process does not focus on identifying classroom practices that enhance students’ algebra skills or improve their ability to read for meaning, for example. Instead, training focuses on team members’ own attitudes and beliefs, and takes the form of cult-like “struggle sessions” marked by psychological manipulation that is wholly out of place at an institution of higher learning.

During these struggle sessions, participants are warned at the outset that becoming equity-minded will be

they claim otherwise 60 years after the monumental Civil Rights Acts of the 1960s?) Team members are assured they must cultivate an “equity mindset” to ferret out the invidious racist barriers said to escape detection by others.

They also learn that many such barriers are the product of “implicit” biases that white people harbor unknowingly. On the institutional level, “hidden,” “unspoken rules, language, people and policies” are said to act as “inhibitors” of equity (emphasis in original). A sharp, equity-focused eye is necessary because often, “policies and practices that appear to be beneficial actually are creating a worsening inequality.”

Equity ideology flies in the face of common sense

Despite Equity and Inclusion authorities' full-bore assault, Equity 2030 has an uphill task in getting support for its implementation from Minn State employees for a simple reason: It doesn't accurately describe how the world works.

One faculty member explains that teachers face real-world challenges that can't be wished away.

"Some students come to class without having read the assignments, or don't understand them if they do," the teacher says. "Some don't turn in their work, or even log into online classes. Some are working night jobs and can't, or don't, have time to prepare."

A major reason, the teacher points out, is that K-12 schools have failed students, particularly minority students, for decades. Low expectations, the elevation of political fads over basic skills, and widespread social promotion have greatly exacerbated the problem. Today, he says, students who are accustomed to taking a test as many times as they want to at high school quickly fall behind at college.

"To help students do better," the teacher explains, "we have to start by acknowledging these shortfalls and devise ways to begin to address them earlier. But now we can't talk about this — it's 'deficit-minded.'"

The illogic — the fantasy, really — behind Equity 2030 stands in bold relief to the lesson of the popular 2005 film, *Coach Carter*. Based on a true story, the film depicts how a black former basketball star transforms his old high school's demoralized, losing team.

Coach Carter knows that many of his players start with economic disadvantages and have tough home lives. But he doesn't "affirm" their counter-productive habits or blame outside forces for losing to teams that work harder. The real problem, he tells them, is within their control. They are in poor physical shape, lack discipline, and are lax in practice.

He demands they work tirelessly to correct their deficits on the court and won't let them play until they raise their grades in class. Most players grumble,



MINNESOTA STATE Office of Equity and Inclusion

System authorities emphasize that total buy-in to the Equity 2030 plan is "critical" to the campaign's success. For Minn State personnel, dissent is not an option.



but by the film's end, they are savoring the victories their investment brings. Coach Carter has given them the key to success in basketball and in life: hard work, high standards, sacrifice and self-discipline.

Equity 2030 tries to bully Minn State faculty and staff to believe — and regurgitate back — the nonsensical notion that students' preparation, study skills and motivation don't matter, and that all students are somehow entitled to make the basketball team (or play first-chair violin in the school orchestra, or win a chess championship) but are held back merely by teacher and institutional racism.

Students generally understand this is not true, unless they are led astray by adults. As one Minn State faculty member observes, "I'll never forget what a black student at an alternative high school once told attendees at a conference I was at: 'The most important thing you can do to help me is to hold me accountable. That's when I do my best work.'"

Equity 2030's core strategy - Putting the onus on teachers

Minn State's Equity and Inclusion czars have placed faculty in an impossible position: They demand that they equalize grades and all other academic outcomes between demographic groups, yet offer them no effective tools to increase real student achievement. Then they denounce teachers as racist if they talk honestly about the realities regarding students' lack of preparation, study skills and effort.

So how, given Equity 2030's fantasy-land premises, do Equity and Inclusion bureaucrats propose to make good on the plan's promise to equalize group academic outcomes in just a few years?

Their strategy is simple. They pass the buck — *offloading* the burden to faculty members and academic advisors, and announcing it's *up to them* individually to figure out how to get to the "right" numbers on student outcomes in their classes.

Equity 2030 doesn't openly prescribe demographic quotas in grading, but it speaks euphemistically in terms of hypotheticals like the following: "If only 20 more Black students" had "received a passing grade out of [an] entire entering cohort, Black students would [have] achieved parity with the rest of the institution's course success rate."

One faculty member recounts how this can play out in practice:

I was dumbfounded when my academic dean presented me with data from the Office of Equity and Inclusion. They had calculated my "course success" rate — how many A's, B's, C's, D's and F's I'd given — broken down by students' race and ethnicity. They'd done it course by course, year by year, class by class.

"In this class," my dean told me, "if you had moved four students from this minority group to the next level, you would have met your racial proportionality goal."

When I asked what tools I could use to catch up students in one semester, I was told I should figure

out how I'd been "advantaging" white students. The message from the system was that I should basically try to be a better person — not be a racist.

But what does that mean? I've always tried to be color blind in my classes, but now I'm told that's racist too. In my online classes, I often don't even know the race of my students.

The teacher expressed frustration at the way the administration intentionally ignores reality. "Most faculty try to make student access as easy as possible," he says. "They can email questions, and faculty have online office hours and do private Zoom sessions. But if students are not reaching out, as many aren't, they can't benefit from all we do."

For Equity and Inclusion bureaucrats, "It's not about learning," the teacher concludes. "It's about twisting the way we teach and assess our classes."

Stigmatizing dissenters

Equity and Inclusion czars can't afford to have their ideology questioned, because it crumbles when logical analysis reveals its inconsistencies. To discourage dissent, Minn State authorities are implementing Equity 2030 in a way that can make it risky and dangerous for employees to point out that "the emperor has no clothes."

One way they swat away criticism is by smearing faculty and staff who don't fall in line as creating "obstacles" that sabotage the equity crusade.

Harkening back to Soviet-era authorities attempting to discredit dissidents to justify re-education, the Toolkit labels those who question Equity 2030's premises or methods as "resistant," insinuating they are guilty of mental or moral failings.

The Toolkit paints resisters as personally incompetent (i.e., as "not being able to notice racialized consequences," or as having an "incapacity to see institutionalized racism in familiar routines"). Alternatively, it describes them as self-deluding or dishonest (i.e., "claiming to see no race" or to "be 'color blind'").

[Emphasis added]

These dissidents are said to fear

change, or being exposed as racist. They are labeled as motivated by "deficit-minded deflection (focus away from self-change)" or by "fear about what the data will reveal (and how that effects (sic) sense-of-self)."

But what Equity and Inclusion enforcers appear to resent the most



Equity and Inclusion czars can't afford to have their ideology questioned, because it crumbles when logical analysis reveals its inconsistencies.

is a challenge to their ideology's fundamental premise: Only white racism can explain demographic academic gaps.

In fact, voluminous social science research documents the high correlation between low academic achievement and complex socioeconomic and "family risk" factors, among them out-of-wedlock births, fatherless homes, low parent education level, and time spent on leisure reading or with screens.

Faculty, staff, or administrators who point out these findings are dismissed as experiencing "discomfort" when "talking about race"; "resisting calls to disaggregate data"; or "substituting race talk with poverty or SES [socioeconomic status] talk."

The Equity by Design Toolkit uses cult-like language to warn Minn

State employees not to fall into error. The Toolkit exhorts them to "remain continuously vigilant so as to not revert to deficit-minded thinking." Above all, they must guard against falling "into the trap of blaming students for lack of proficiency, engagement or preparedness as being the cause of inequities."

Fear discourages non-conformity

The Equity 2030 implementation process is at different stages across the Minn State system. Right now, the administration's focus is primarily on "course success" (pass) rates, say system insiders. But going forward, pressure is likely to mount on teachers who don't meet their "racially proportionate" numbers, especially at campuses in the Twin Cities metro area.

"Some faculty members I know are terrified," reports one experienced teacher. "The expectation is that our college president will be holding it over us. The message coming through is, 'You better change your ways. Start grading differently; adjust what you're doing in class.'"

Teachers on contract, in particular, "feel a lot of heat for this," adding, "If you're semester-to-semester, that's a pretty tough way to live. The way to avoid being the 'resistant' teacher is to be the easiest grader."

Even tenured faculty members are worried. "They will leverage what power they have over tenured faculty," another teacher explains. "They have power to tell you what classes you will teach and when — you could find yourself teaching Saturday morning or only at night if you don't go along."

A weary veteran faculty member sums up the unfolding scandal this way: "The saddest thing about all this is that Minn State isn't addressing the problem, but papering over it. System administrators are not saying, 'Let's do better and help these students sooner.' They're saying, 'Let's just pretend that faculty and the system are causing the gap.' The system is just setting these kids up for another rung of failure. The truth is, we are blinding ourselves on purpose." ★

SYSTEMIC FAILURE

Dramatic recent damage to Minnesota's law enforcement institutions has led to a corresponding rise in crime. Past experience tells us how we can turn this around.

The growing number of Minnesotans who are frustrated and distressed by the stunning decline in public safety in the state need only look to the 1990s for a path back.

Unchecked gang activity in the Twin Cities in the mid 1990s sparked such

a significant spike in violent crime that the *New York Times* dubbed us "Murderapolis."

"Something's wrong, and I'm going to say it...We've got a crisis in the African-American community, and we've got to deal with it...We're going to stop people

for minor traffic violations, and we're going to check them for illegal guns." That was a statement from Minneapolis Mayor Sharon Sayles Belton to *Newsweek* in 1995, amidst a string of street violence that plagued the city.

Outrage over the level of violence

BY DAVID ZIMMER

coalesced into a resolute coalition of citizens, community activists, clergy, police, prosecutors, judges, and politicians to attack the problem head on. This coalition provided a mandate to police and the criminal justice system to go after criminals and stop the violence. A proactive, targeted, and sustained effort took place by law enforcement, prosecutors, the courts, and corrections to go on the offensive and restore order. Federal law enforcement and courts added their weight, too. Through the efforts of several task forces and coordinated initiatives, many of the most active criminals were incarcerated. Those not incarcerated got the message — Minnesota was no longer hospitable to crime.

This unambiguous civic mandate to police and the criminal justice system represented the beginning of an impressive 22-year decline in Minnesota’s crime rate.

Unfortunately, since 2018, Minnesota has seen dramatic increases in crime, especially violent crime. In 2020, Minnesota officially became a high crime state, surpassing the national average for the first time in the state’s history.

How did we get here?

The other lesson of understanding our current problem is to examine how we got here. While the rise in crime is a complex problem that cannot be blamed on any single factor, the Defund the Police movement championed by Black Lives Matter (BLM) has arguably pushed our criminal justice system away from the community’s long-term best interest, especially in predominantly black neighborhoods that bear the brunt of recent chaos.

BLM’s history

Black activists founded BLM in 2013 after a Florida court acquitted Hispanic security guard George Zimmerman of criminal charges in the shooting death of Trayvon Martin, a 17-year-old black youth. BLM’s reaction gave voice to the frustration felt by many that the criminal justice system valued black people less than white people. The movement began

focusing on fatal encounters between law enforcement and black suspects.

BLM intensified its response to subsequent in-custody or officer-involved deaths. It effectively influenced the decision-making process in these cases by targeting prosecutors, judges, politicians, and police leaders.

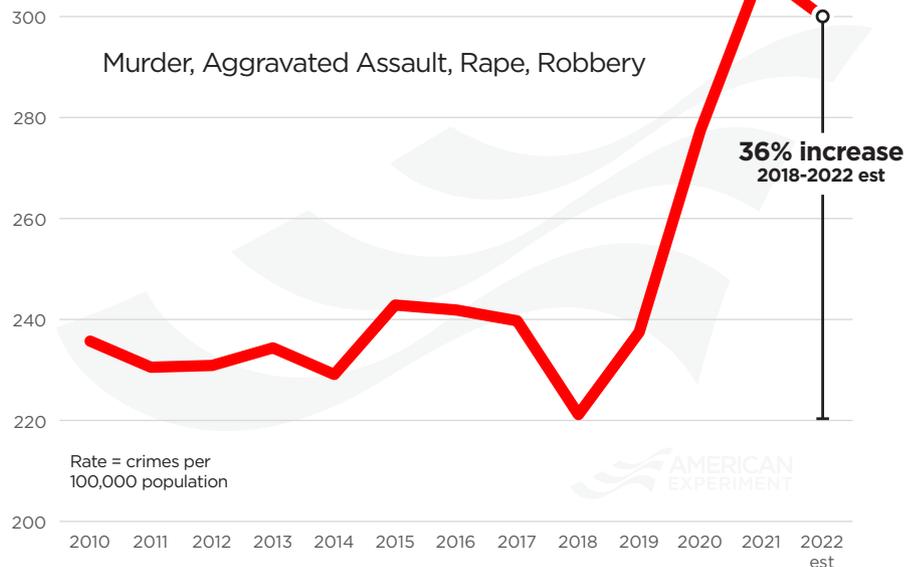
The BLM movement began to emerge in Minnesota in 2015 after a white officer killed Jamar Clark, a black man who had interfered with police officers and an ambulance crew trying to aid a woman whom he had reportedly assaulted. During a struggle, Clark wrestled with the officers and attempted to take a holstered handgun from one of them. The other officer fired a single round killing Clark and stopping the threat.

a precedent, demoralized officers, and emboldened activists.

County Attorney Mike Freeman added to the chaos by declining to impanel a grand jury to make a charging decision. It backfired on Freeman when he conceded that the officer who shot Clark acted within the law. Now BLM targeted Freeman. They disrupted his press conferences and protested at his home.

In July 2016, Hispanic officer Jeronimo Yanez shot and killed Philando Castile, a black man, during a traffic stop in Falcon Heights. After Castile informed Yanez he possessed a licensed handgun, the officer told him not to touch it. The situation quickly escalated as the officer ordered Castile not to “pull it out” several times before shooting him.

Minnesota Violent Crime Rate 2010 - Present



BLM in Minneapolis led an 18-day “occupation” of the Minneapolis Police Department’s 4th Precinct. Protesters blocked Plymouth Avenue and encircled most of the precinct station, holding bonfires in the street and pelting the building with rocks and bricks. Minneapolis officials declined to interfere with the protests. Instead, they ceded the street to activists and bussed officers into work at the precinct for weeks. It set

Ramsey County Attorney John Choi appointed independent counsel to review the case, and Yanez was charged with 2nd degree manslaughter. A jury acquitted him. Demonstrations ensued, but not to the degree Minnesotans would see in subsequent years.

The Castile case ushered in two troubling developments for the law enforcement community.

First, this was the first time in

state history that an officer had been charged with a crime involving an on-duty shooting. It was clear that some prosecutors had now been influenced by the BLM narrative that police were targeting people of color, and it was their duty to correct this injustice.

Second, liberal politicians brazenly exploited the Castile case on the day of the incident without waiting for due process, well before any facts had been established. According to the *Star Tribune*, U.S. Sen. Al Franken stated, “I am horrified that we are forced to confront yet another death of a young African-American man at the hands of law enforcement. And I am heartbroken for Philando’s family and loved ones, whose son, brother, boyfriend, and nephew was taken from them last night.” And former U.S. Rep. Keith Ellison, current MN Attorney General,

**In 2020, Minnesota
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denounced the “systematic targeting of African Americans and a systematic lack of accountability” in the *Washington Post*.

Their words demonstrated how BLM was influencing citizens, law enforcement leadership, city leadership, elected county attorneys, and now state and federal political leadership.

The law enforcement community took notice.

Then came George Floyd. In an incident with world-wide notoriety in May 2020, Floyd had resisted arrest during a counterfeit bill complaint and died while in the custody of Minneapolis police. Floyd, a black man, was placed face down in handcuffs while officer Derrick Chauvin, a white man, knelt on his shoulder and neck for nine minutes as police waited for an ambulance. Floyd eventually went into cardiac arrest and died.

All four officers at the scene were relieved of duty and charged with varying levels of murder and manslaughter in state court and civil rights violations in federal

court — an extremely rare and arguably politically motivated move.

In three days, violence and lawlessness broke out in Minneapolis and throughout the nation as video of Floyd’s death, recorded by several bystanders, went viral. The focus of the world was on Minneapolis, and our political, legal, and public safety leadership seemed paralyzed.

Demonstrators descended upon the Minneapolis 3rd police precinct and the downtown government campus, which included the County Courthouse and City Hall. Roadways were shut down and businesses were looted and burned throughout the city. In an act of stunning capitulation, city and state leaders abandoned the precinct, enabling protesters to firebomb the station. Over two years later, the burned-out building sits vacant as a trophy to lawlessness.

BLM garnered significant support from cross-sections of Minnesotans in the days after Floyd’s death. It was common for officers who were holding security lines to be confronted by elected officials who had joined the protesters and were demanding the dismantling and defunding of police.

Law enforcement felt betrayed, and Minnesotans have paid a heavy price ever since.

The aftermath

While damage began to occur in our public safety institutions after the Jamar Clark case, it was unnecessarily widened in the Castile case, and completely ripped open in the Floyd case.

Many opportunistic progressive politicians called for the defunding and dismantling of law enforcement. Major corporations and individual donors, believing BLM’s narrative, donated millions of dollars to the organization in 2020.

In June of that year, Rep. Ilhan Omar told *MinnPost*, “I think there is an

opportunity for them to, in dismantling and disbanding the Minneapolis Police Department, to really rid our society of the current form of policing that we have and put in place one that prioritizes crime prevention and community response.”

Many are now trying to walk back or at least mute the progressive position, but the damage has been done. “I think allowing this moniker, ‘Defund the police,’ to ever get out there, was not a good thing,” Ellison told *CNN* in November 2021.

The attempts to distance themselves from the movement many progressives helped create are not completely sincere. In a July 2022 Judiciary Committee hearing in Congress, N.C. Sen. Thom Tillis shared a website for ActBlue, a Democrat fundraising group. One of the group’s major fundraisers was a 13.12 mile run. The group proudly announced that the distance 1-3-1-2 corresponded to the letters A-C-A-B, which stand for “All Cops Are Bastards.”

Minnesota is now a state with a law enforcement community that is demoralized and critically understaffed, a court system that is exacerbating the problem by failing to keep criminals behind bars, a correctional system that inexplicably favors supervision to incarceration, and a political establishment that refuses to lead.

Effect on law enforcement

Minnesota is struggling with a dramatic drop in the number of law enforcement officers willing to stay on the job. Minnesota’s ratio of officers to citizens now stands at 1.9/1,000. The national average is about 2.8/1,000. Minnesota is arguably 5,000 officers below “average.”

Those who remain have pulled back into reactive mode instead of operating with the proactive mandate healthy communities provide their police.

Recruitment has also hit an all-time



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low, and most colleges are experiencing a decline in the number of students interested in law enforcement. Observers agree that this is likely to result in agencies hiring sub-par candidates — people who would not have made the cut in previous years.

The anti-police movement has simultaneously destabilized law enforcement and emboldened criminals. Since 2018, criminal offenses throughout Minnesota have increased 105 percent, while arrests have decreased by 57 percent. Another manifestation of the anti-police movement is a dramatic 165 percent increase in assaults against peace officers in Minnesota from 2017-2021.

System partners?

Sadly, the entire criminal justice system has overreacted to the pressures applied by the anti-police BLM movement. In the end, the system has failed to come together to address the rise in crime.

Progressive prosecutors are abdicating their responsibility to prosecute criminals. They have decriminalized swaths of crimes or declared legally obtained evidence from traffic stops off limits to their assistant prosecutors. Some sitting county attorneys, and several candidates for that office, have made “holding the police accountable” a top priority. But where, exactly, does holding *criminals* accountable factor in their list of priorities?

The courts have also failed to properly address crime in recent years, releasing far too many repeat offenders and violent criminals into supervision, where they can easily commit *more* violent crimes.

Consider the case of Pablo Nava Jaimes in Ramsey County. In June 2022, Jaimes shot at three peace officers while leading them on a high-speed chase through St. Paul and into White Bear Lake. American Experiment’s Criminal Injustice tracker illustrates how he was released on an abnormally low bail for such a crime, despite having been wanted on another warrant and having a U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement record that included a reported *seven* previous deportations.

This points to a trend in which many in the criminal justice system believe it is their calling to fix societal issues

CRIMINAL INJUSTICE

Pablo Nava Jaimes, 30, Minneapolis

Ramsey Co. Attorney John Choi

Judge Kellie M. Charles

Situation

- Fled police for speeding
- Fired 10 shots at officers

Criminal History

- Wanted on a felony warrant for having meth, alcohol, and a loaded handgun in his car. Warrant was issued after he failed to attend his hearing. Was previously subject to 7 deportations.

Charges

- 3 counts of 1st Degree Assault Using Deadly Force Against a Peace Officer, and 2 counts of Drive-By Shooting at an Occupied Vehicle
- Choi's office argued to maintain \$5 million bail but failed to persuade the Court.

Result

- Lowered bail from \$5,000,000 to \$100,000, which Jaimes obtained from "The Bail Bond Doctor"

INJUSTICE

Communities expect prosecutors and judges to take violent criminals off the streets and keep us safe. What happened here?

A recent posting from American Experiment’s Criminal Injustice tracker, which highlights the revolving door of criminals through Minnesota’s justice system.

through sentencing and correctional policy. This mindset ignores the fact that it’s far too late to effectively address societal issues once someone has been found guilty — not to mention that it arguably encourages more crime through a lack of accountability.

Yet, that is exactly what many judges attempt to do. Downward departures at sentencing are now occurring at an alarming rate. According to the Minnesota Sentencing Guidelines Commission, Minnesota judges departed down on a record-setting 43.2 percent of presumptive commitments in 2020 (sentences where the guidelines directed a prison sentence rather than community supervision). The two previous records were set in 2018 and 2019, respectively. This is an awful trend.

Correctional leaders have adopted this supervision-over-incarceration philosophy at the very time Minnesota is experiencing an historic spike in crime. Minnesota now ranks 48th in the nation for the lowest incarceration rate, despite rapidly rising crime rates.

Can Minnesota recover?

Law enforcement serves a vital role in maintaining peace and security in Minnesota communities. When police are attacked and devalued, and when their mandate is taken away, public safety suffers.

Unfortunately, Minnesotans have learned this lesson the hard way. Thankfully, there are signs that a healthy appreciation for law enforcement is returning.

• In a 2021 *Thinking Minnesota* Poll, 86

percent of respondents said they had total confidence in their local police to act in the best interest of the public.

- In a September 2021 *Star Tribune* poll, black respondents overwhelmingly rejected the notion that Minneapolis should reduce the size of its police force, 75 percent to 14 percent.
- Minneapolis voters followed up in November 2021 by rejecting their own city council’s efforts to eliminate the police department.
- A University of Massachusetts, Amherst poll found that support for the BLM movement’s goals had decreased from 48 percent in April 2021 to 31 percent in May 2022.

As columnist AJ Kaufman wrote in a July 2022 article for *Alpha News*, “To reduce violence in any community — Akron, Minneapolis, Chicago, wherever — residents must address the villains within their own community, not get sidetracked by hustlers who absolutely don’t want solutions. Anger is natural after a tragedy, and it’s much easier — but far less productive — to promote faux outrage than to seek peace.”

As civic leaders demonstrated in the 1990s, solutions to Minnesota’s crime problem require strong unwavering support for proactive law enforcement, a stricter judicial adherence to our sentencing guidelines, and a rejection of the current feeble levels of incarceration in the correctional community. Strong community resolve can achieve this, while strong unwavering leadership will maintain it. ★

To Lockdown, or Not To Lockdown? THAT IS THE QUESTION

Counting the economic costs of government policy responses to COVID-19.

BY JOHN PHELAN

In March 2020, COVID-19 hit Minnesota. State and local governments enacted a number of measures — so-called “non-pharmaceutical interventions” (NPIs) — intended to slow the spread of the virus and save lives. The most prevalent and widespread measures enacted by state and local governments were so-called “lockdowns” of individuals and shutdowns of certain “non-essential” businesses. These specific tactics were covered in the spring

2021 issue of *Thinking Minnesota* in the article, “Covid Confusion.”

The government-imposed lockdowns and shuttering of businesses imposed a heavy economic cost on the state. Minnesota’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) fell by 9.7 percent in real terms from the fourth quarter of 2019 to the second quarter of 2020. In the seven days from March 16 to March 22, 2020, 126,603 Minnesotans filed for unemployment insurance and the unemployment rate jumped from 3.9

percent in February to 10.8 percent in May. This was the most severe shock our state’s economy has suffered on record. After more than two years, economies across the United States are still recovering.

Costs versus benefits

Were these measures worthwhile? This is an important question to ask — and part of a more essential and substantive evaluation of how policymakers and public health officials shape their



**The consequences of
shutting down the state
— and the country —
to combat this virus
persist, and will for years.**

responses to events that can have far-reaching consequences economically but also for society at-large.

Public policy must be judged by its costs, as well as its benefits. While there was much discussion of the supposed benefits of NPIs in terms of lives saved, there was — and has been — much less discussion of their costs. Indeed, at the time any acknowledgment that such costs even existed was likely to invite a charge of “COVID denialism.”

As the latest *Thinking Minnesota*

Poll shows, trust in institutions — specifically public health — is dramatically low among Minnesotans. For trust in institutions to return, especially regarding public health, it is important to evaluate the judgment and policies put in place during public health emergencies such as during the COVID-19 outbreak. For those in the public sphere, they need to consider a more nuanced, balanced approach to the benefits as well as the costs to the economy rather than making sweeping

assumptions or targeted attacks.

As these evaluations are made, the evidence continues to accumulate that these measures did have costs — and very significant ones. From higher crime to lower educational outcomes, the consequences of shutting down the state — and the country — to combat this virus persist, and will for years to come.

To weigh the costs of these measures against their benefits we need to quantify those costs and benefits. Quantifying the economic costs of government policy responses to COVID-19 is the subject of American Experiment’s new report, “The Costs of Lockdowns and Shutdowns: Counting the economic costs of government policy responses to COVID-19.”

Quantifying government responses

One of the advantages of America’s federalist system of government is that individual states have autonomy in implementing certain laws and policies. Each state is mostly free to enact laws and regulations best suited for the people of that state. This system was a good way to observe different policies — and their consequences — during the COVID pandemic. Did these differences in policy response account for differences in the

observed economic outcomes? If so, how much of these differences were they responsible for?

To answer these questions, we focus our analysis on GDP, a standard measure of a state's economic health, specifically the percentage change in real GDP from quarter to quarter for the five quarters 2020:Q1, 2020:Q2, 2020:Q3, 2020:Q4, and 2021:Q1. This is the response (or outcome) variable. Did government policy responses to COVID-19 influence the growth rates observed?

To assess the impact of government policy responses on real GDP growth we need some way of quantifying those government policy responses. Fortunately, the Blavatnik School of Government at Oxford University produced a "Coronavirus Government Response Tracker," which gave the 50 states and District of Columbia a daily index number up to April 28, 2021, quantifying the stringency of their policy response to COVID-19. We use the

To assess the impact of government policy responses on real GDP growth, we need to quantify those responses.

average daily stringency score over the quarter as one of our explanatory (or factor) variables.

Of course, government anti-COVID-19 policies were not the only influences working on state economies over this period; the virus itself was something of a moving target as seasons changed and mutations occurred. We can hypothesize that, to some extent, people reacted to it by staying home even without the government telling them to. This will have imposed some economic cost independent of any actions taken by government.

The virus needs to be quantified to test this — but how? There are three possible measures: cases, hospitalizations, and deaths, all adjusted for population.

Figure 1



Source: Center of the American Experiment

However, there are drawbacks to using cases as a measure as there were many asymptomatic cases of COVID-19, meaning people were unaware they had been infected. The only data we have for cases, then, is for *diagnosed* cases, which is not the same thing, and could be a function of a more extensive testing regime rather than of an increased prevalence of the virus. Nevertheless, newly diagnosed cases were the numbers generally reported. So, to the extent that people reacted to this news, it seems reasonable to use the average daily number of new cases in a quarter taken from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention as another explanatory variable.

Fiscal policies also differ across states and this, too, could account for some of the differences in the observed economic outcomes. The Tax Foundation's "State Business Tax Climate Index" awards each jurisdiction a score. These scores for 2020 and 2021 can be used as a third explanatory variable.

It is also true that, at both the national and local level, the economic impacts of COVID-19 were much heavier in two sectors of the economy more than in the others: arts, entertainment, and recreation; and accommodation and food services. Nationally, the decline in arts, entertainment, and recreation GDP from the fourth quarter of 2019 to the second quarter of 2020 was 58.8 percent, more than double the decline in the third most heavily impacted sector nationally — which was transportation and warehousing at 24.7 percent. The second worst hit sector nationally in that period,

accommodation and food services, saw a decline of 48.0 percent, nearly double the decline than that of transportation and warehousing. It seems reasonable to assume, then, that jurisdictions with higher shares of their overall GDP in these sectors going into the pandemic would have been more heavily impacted. Indeed, while the share of United States GDP derived from arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation, and food services was 3.9 percent in 2019, for Hawaii it was 11.1 percent, and for Nevada it was 15.2 percent. These were the two worst hit states in terms of GDP between the fourth quarter of 2019 and the first quarter of 2022. So, another explanatory variable will be the share of the jurisdiction's economy accounted for by the arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation, and food services sectors in 2019.

The results

With our response variable — the percentage change in real GDP from quarter to quarter — and our explanatory variables — the average daily stringency score, average daily number of new cases, tax burden, and share of the jurisdiction's economy accounted for by the arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation, and food services sector in 2019 — we can run a multiple panel regression measuring the impact of our chosen explanatory variables on the growth rate of real GDP.

Taken from a technical standpoint, a few key statistics summarize the findings. Our Prob(F-statistic) is less

Figure 2



Source: Center of the American Experiment

than 0.05, which indicates that our explanatory variables combined have a statistically significant association with real GDP growth rates. The individual p-values tell us whether each explanatory variable is significant. They show us that, while the stringency of government policy responses has a statistically significant relationship with growth rates of real GDP ($p < 0.05$), none of the other explanatory variables do ($p > 0.05$). The Adjusted R Square value of 0.877 indicates that 87.7 percent of the variation in real GDP growth rates can be explained by differences in our explanatory variables, daily new cases, tax burden, and portion of the state's GDP coming from arts and entertainment. The Coefficients of each explanatory variable tell us the average expected change in the growth rate of real GDP, assuming the other explanatory variables remain constant. For each point increase in the stringency index, the growth rate of real GDP is expected to decrease by 0.05 percentage points.

This coefficient enables us to make a quantitative estimate of the impact of stringency — government policy responses to COVID-19 — on real GDP growth. First, we calculate the effect of stringency then subtract the stringency effect from the observed change in real GDP to estimate what that would have been without these policy responses.

This can be repeated for each jurisdiction in each quarter to come up with estimated real GDP growth rates without government COVID-19 responses. Those rates can then be

applied for the five quarters 2020:Q1, 2020:Q2, 2020:Q3, 2020:Q4, and 2021:Q1 to the level of GDP in Q4:2019 to estimate what per capita GDP would have been without government policy responses to COVID-19.

Figure 1 shows the difference between actual GDP in the first quarter of 2021 and the estimate of GDP in that quarter without government policy responses to COVID-19. Hawaii suffered the greatest loss resulting from its government's policy responses — responses that included statewide limits on social gatherings, bars, and restaurants, statewide mask mandates and proof of vaccination, as well as strict traveling restrictions into the state — with GDP lower by 4.2 percent (\$3.1 billion) in the first quarter of 2021 than it would have been without these responses. At the other end of the scale is Utah, whose government policy responses to COVID-19 imposed an economic cost of 2.1 percent of GDP (\$3.9 billion). Utah lifted its mask mandate and social gathering restrictions by early spring in 2021. Minnesota's GDP in the first quarter of 2021 was 3.1 percent (\$10.6 billion) lower as a result of the government's policy response to COVID-19 — measures that included an extended peacetime state of emergency and city or county mask mandates and limits on social gatherings — ranking it 25th in the nation.

Figure 2 puts this into some perspective, dividing these dollar losses by the population to derive a per capita loss. Here, the District of Columbia was

by far the worst hit jurisdiction with a per capita GDP loss of \$6,152 by the first quarter of 2021 resulting from its government's COVID-19 policy response. This should be qualified, however, by noting that it is one of the easier jurisdictions to move out of while still working and producing GDP there. Its population decline — 2.5 percent from 2019 to 2021 — was the steepest among the 51 jurisdictions, indicating that a fall in the denominator (population) played a more significant role in the result of this equation than elsewhere. At the other end of the scale is Mississippi, whose government's COVID-19 policy responses imposed costs of “only” \$1,004 per person by the first quarter of 2021. Minnesota's government policy responses to COVID-19 cost each resident \$1,866 in lost GDP by the end of the first quarter of 2021, or \$7,464 for a family of four: This was the *15th biggest hit in the United States*.

Moving forward

These estimates do not say whether the public policy responses to the COVID pandemic were justified, but quantifying the economic costs of the unprecedented peacetime impositions on economic life by state and local governments in response to COVID-19 are crucial to their evaluation. Benefits and costs must be weighed to make that judgment. The analysis made through quantifying the economic costs are a solid first step in evaluating the overall appropriateness of the government's policy responses. The question, then, is what were the medical benefits of these policy responses, most notably the lockdowns and shutdowns that had the most impact on the economy?

When such estimates are offered, we now have two policy priorities discordant with each other: economic health or public health. We can now begin to answer the question of whether the cost of these policy responses — \$7,464 for a Minnesota family of four over the first year of the pandemic — were worth the benefits. And Minnesota has a quantitative tool and a historical example to make better, more informed decisions should a similar situation occur in the future. ★

Q&A

Josh Holmes joins Center president John Hinderaker for a live taping of his *Ruthless* podcast June 29 on Lake Minnetonka.

A RUTHLESS RETURN

Native Minnesotan **Josh Holmes** tells **John Hinderaker** about his political journey to Washington, D.C. and the unbelievable success of his podcast.





Josh Holmes is the president and founder of Cavalry, a public affairs firm specializing in issue management, digital advocacy, and strategic communications based in Washington, D.C. After starting his career on the Senate staff of Sen. Norm Coleman, he went on to serve as chief of staff and campaign manager to Sen. Mitch McConnell. He currently co-hosts the popular political podcast *Ruthless*, which boasts an average of five million unique listeners.

John Hinderaker: Tell us about your Minnesota roots.

Josh Holmes: Yes, Minnesota born and raised; a product of Minnetonka High School. I left to go to Arizona State and then pretty quickly made my way to D.C., but not before I came back to work on Norm Coleman’s campaign in 2002.

What did you do there?

I was a field staffer in central Minnesota. Field staffers do all kinds of things. You organize volunteers and put up yard signs. I was just doing anything I could. You break your back for the cause and see if you can get somebody’s attention to hire you — and hopefully you win. I guess it worked out, but it was really a wild ride.

Did you go to Washington with Norm?

I did. And my introduction to politics was when the incumbent Democratic senator died in a plane crash 13 days before the election and Walter Mondale being substituted. Before that, I wasn’t terribly political. My parents were very into politics. We probably spent most of our time at the dinner table talking politics. They always joked that if they had been talking about finance, I’d be a lot better off than I am today.

My real introduction to all of this was an

internship that started three weeks before 9/11. It had a pretty profound impact on my view of public service and how I could make a difference. At that point in my life, I was struggling to figure out how I could make a difference. And of course, podcasts had not yet been invented. So, you couldn’t go down that road.

Have you been in Washington ever since you went out there with Coleman in 2002?

With a couple of exceptions. I went out with our old buddy, Tom Mason (editor and publisher of *Thinking Minnesota*), to Washington state in 2004 as a policy director on an ill-fated Senate race against Patty Murray. I was young and idealistic, and I was excited about that. I met



(Left to right): Megyn Kelly hosts John Ashbrook, Michael Duncan, Holmes, and Comfortably Smug on her eponymous talk show.

a lot of great people and learned a lot of great lessons. But coming back to D.C., I had to figure it out. At that point I’d been in the policy side and done a little bit of speechwriting. I liked communications a lot, but basically, I would do anything that anybody would hire me to do.

You wound up in some important places. You worked for [then Senate Minority Leader] Mitch McConnell.

When I met McConnell I was literally, I’m not kidding you, three months into unemployment and this close to having to pack up from D.C. and move back home. I’d basically run out of money and the credit cards were at their limit. I got a call from an assistant of Ken Mehlman



who had run President Bush's reelection in 2004. He was now the chairman of the RNC and asked if I wanted to come in for an interview. I honestly didn't even listen to the job description; I'd figure it out later. I was fortunate enough to get that job, but Ken ultimately was the one who introduced me to Leader McConnell right after he had been elected leader for the first time in December 2006.

What was your initial role with McConnell?

He wanted to do something brand new with communications for the Senate Republicans. He wanted a younger person who had some different ideas about modern communications. I thought I would be there for six months to help open up a communications center and then join one of the presidential campaigns.

I spent three months with McConnell and it just clicked. For the first time in my career, I felt like not only did I know what I was doing, I was bringing some level of expertise to somebody who was light years ahead everybody else in the Senate at that time. My biggest complaint about the Senate was that everyone spent their days talking about things that were never going to happen. McConnell only talked about things that were going to happen, and it clicked. And close to 10 years later, I still find myself in that orbit.

You were with McConnell how long?

When you're with McConnell, it's like La Cosa Nostra: You never really leave. I was with him the first day of Congress in January 2007 all the way through 2014 when I left to run his reelection and oversee the Senate Republican campaign to try to retake the majority. We thought at the time it was the last best chance he had to become majority leader. He had been minority leader for a lot of cycles at that point, and so we were all-hands-on-deck to try to win the majority in 2014.

What did you learn about McConnell in those years?

He's extremely thoughtful and plans weeks, months, years in advance. And so, what he's primarily focused on may not



I've never been interested in screaming and telling people how dumb they are and how they don't get it. For me, it's the art of persuasion.

satisfy the grassroots anxiety of the day, which frustrates people, right? I think a lot of people want their Senator, their Leader, to voice the frustrations they're feeling day-to-day. But that's never been his style. He looks forward in order to figure out how to make real change at a moment of absolute maximum impact.

Describe your transition into consulting.

I left after the 2014 campaign. At that point, I'd been McConnell's chief of staff for a few years during which I had the opportunity to watch how advocacy had sort of atrophied. I felt like there was a real missing link between all of the modern digital persuasion techniques and what everybody in the entire advocacy world was doing to influence conservative outcomes.

So early in 2015, I opened up a company called Cavalry with John Ashbrook, who I'd left the Senate office with to go do the campaign work. We thought we had an expertise — a niche in the marketplace. And about two years later, it seemed like everybody was doing what we were doing. So, it must have worked.

Did you consult for campaigns primarily?

No, we didn't want to just be campaign consultants. We thought we could bring something larger to the conservative world writ large. We thought we could take advocacy to the next level, so it was primarily issues based. We still do one or two campaigns every cycle just because

we love it. But it's not our primary business. Probably about 80 percent of what we do is in the private space.

The *Ruthless* podcast has taken the world by storm. How did it start?

John Ashbrook, Michael Duncan, and I had all worked together. We had this incubated thought about what the Right was sorely lacking. The Left was using comedic and entertainment value in late night shows. We felt there was a gaping hole for people who would laugh at themselves and laugh at the world of politics without having to scream at you all day. I've never been interested in screaming and telling people how dumb they are and how they don't get it. For me, it's the art of persuasion. For me, there are a lot of Reaganesque qualities in being able to laugh together at things you find mutually hilarious, and then begin to explain why it is that the Right's perspective is actually the *right* perspective.

The fourth member of the *Ruthless* team is Comfortably Smug, who is a Twitter star. How did you get hooked up with him?

So Smug and I had operated in the same world and never met each other. Online, we basically found ourselves advocating for the same things for years. One day, out of the blue, Smug sent me a Direct Message on Twitter. He was in town and asked if I wanted to go out for a drink. I'd never met this guy. He was like my Wizard of Oz. We sat down, had a great time, and our personalities really meshed.

We talked zero business, but we were just laughing and kind of had the same irreverent sense of humor about things. A week or two later, we all sat down and said, “Yeah, absolutely. Let’s do it.” We literally had the exact same idea to do the exact same thing. Then it was just a matter of how to execute the podcast.

When did *Ruthless* go live?

We went live in October 2020 — but the backstory of this is about coming up with a name. We settled on *Ruthless* because a *New York Times* columnist wrote that the McConnell campaigns were hilariously ruthless — you know, they’d always had humor in how they were cutting their opponents down. And we thought that was actually pretty good. Let’s just go with *Ruthless*. Then Ruth Bader Ginsburg dies. And so, we have this heart-to-heart not knowing if we can go with that — it’s going to be horribly controversial. And Smug says, “Yeah, *that’s the point*.” So, we just decided to go with it and see what happened. It was sort of a Rorschach test for the Left to see who attributes your motives based upon the name of your podcast. It got a lot of attention.

How did it become so popular, so fast?

We did zero promotion. Smug had a huge following, which was obviously extremely helpful. I was pretty well known in town in terms of being able to get guests. Tom Cotton, I think, came on our third episode. And if you have somebody on like Cotton right before an election, people tune in and listen. So, we had a lot of friends who did us some favors at the front end.

It’s become sort of a staple for conservatives to come on *Ruthless*. It’s a long form interview so you can tell whether guests are faking it or not. We don’t grill people with the usual questions they might hear from mainstream media. We give you the floor and we let you talk about your views, and then we ask outside-the-box questions. You can immediately tell who’s faking it. I think one reason our audience loves it is because it is the ultimate authenticity test. If you can carry a half-hour on *Ruthless*

and be entertaining, authentic, and serious — and also have a good sense of humor — you have a pretty good chance of making it with the audience.

How big is *Ruthless*?

I think it’s around five million unique listeners now. To be honest, the metrics for podcasts are a bit of a black box. We know it expands exponentially each and every month, which is the only thing we really care about. We have not been doing this very long, and it’s been a pretty steep climb upwards. And honestly, we didn’t know what we were doing. We started this in the middle of COVID, and D.C. was locked down. We did our first 20, 25, 30 episodes on laptops over Zoom with a USB microphone plugged into the side.

It’s become sort of a staple for conservatives to come on *Ruthless*. It’s a long form interview so you can tell whether guests are faking it or not. **We don’t grill people with the usual questions they might hear from mainstream media.**

Have you found a way to monetize it?

We have sponsored episodes. What we haven’t done is jump into the commoditized marketplace, where you sign up with platforms and they slip product ads into the middle of your podcast. In the early stages of *Ruthless*, we felt it would be inauthentic for us to say the message that we’re trying to sell and then be like, “Oh, and by the way, here’s a Big Mac.”

American Experiment welcomed you back to Minnesota with “*Ruthless on the Lake*,” a live event that we hosted.

I can’t thank you enough, because

the opportunity for me to come home and do this in front of friends and family is huge. I never considered being a podcaster or being in any kind of entertainment business at all. I think a lot of the work that American Experiment has done in cultivating a grassroots network of really serious conservatives who are undaunted by the fact that it’s been close to 20 years since we’ve had a lot of success is, in a cycle like this, incredibly important. With the right movement, the right energy, the right attitude all pushing in one direction — it can happen. I’ve seen it in a lot of states.

“*Ruthless on the Lake*” sold out in two hours, and it was mostly young people.

Well, like I said, our audience is primarily like we were when we first got into this. We try not to sit and preach politics. We’re going to try to have fun. We’re going to pick up on observations of the world that we know you’re going to agree with if you could just get it served up in the right way. And so, people are naturally conservative. Sure. But they’re also working their first job, or they’re taking their young family to softball practice. They don’t eat, breathe, and sleep this every day like we do. And if you get something that is entertaining, they tend to respond. The thing that we like most about this audience is it’s really a community. The give and take on social media is incredible and the interaction is unbelievable.

We also have an open forum. People who are listeners to *Ruthless* call themselves the Minions, but they also see themselves as a community. So, when there are serious things that we bring up, they take it seriously and they want to take action. Now, they also like to have a lot of fun, which is why all those tickets sold in the first two hours.

Where do you see *Ruthless* going from here?

We want to try to expand both the audience and add different platforms, with print and whatnot. I don’t know that we’ll ever advertise, but I do think that we will add video components. ★



The
THINKING
MINNESOTA
POLL

MINNESOTA MALAISE

Disquieted voters have flipped the script on the state's usually sunny disposition as they prepare to head to the polls this fall.

What is the mood of Minnesota voters as they prepare to go to the polls this year? Respondents in the *Thinking Minnesota* Poll answered that question loud and clear. Questions that captured Minnesotans' feelings about the future, economic opportunities, and trust in institutions reveal a mood of unease and growing concern about the future.

The poll was conducted by Meeting Street Insights, a nationally recognized polling operation based in Charleston, S.C. Using a mix of cellular and landline phones, the company interviewed 500 registered voters across Minnesota from August

8-10, 2022. The margin of error is ± 4.38 percent.

For a broad perspective, Minnesotans were asked about their confidence in the future of their country on a 1 to 10 scale with 10 being most optimistic and one being least optimistic. The results are striking. Only 15 percent of respondents placed their optimism in the 8 to 10 range, compared with 35 percent who rated their confidence at only 1 to 3. The mean answer was only 4.7. Those results are a far cry from the optimism that has typified American history.

Voters expressed more optimism about their state than the



FIGURE 1: Optimism about the future of the country is running quite low.

“On a scale of one to 10, with one meaning that you are the least optimistic and 10 meaning that you are the most optimistic, how optimistic are you about the future of our country?”

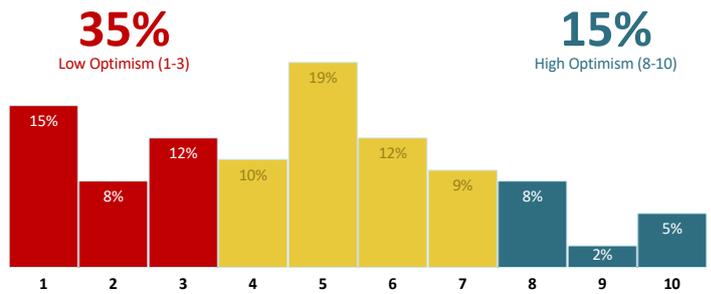


FIGURE 2: Only one out of three say they are optimistic about the future of Minnesota.

“On a scale of one to 10, with one meaning that you are the least optimistic and 10 meaning that you are the most optimistic, how optimistic are you about the future of the state of Minnesota?”

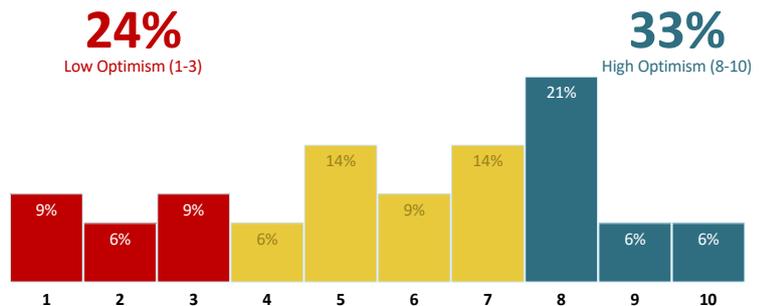
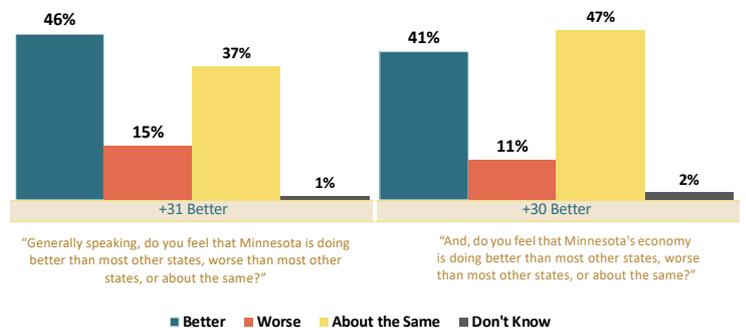


FIGURE 3: Still, there is a level of “Minnesota Optimism” that continues here.



country as a whole. Asked the same question about Minnesota’s future, 34 percent of respondents rated their optimism 8 through 10, while 24 percent rated it 1 through 3. The mean answer was 5.8.

But when asked the question, “Do you think that your children or the next generation will be better off than your generation

About the pollster

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

“Minnesotans are increasingly pessimistic about the type of economy they’re passing onto their children.”

FIGURE 4: A solid majority say the next generation will be worse off economically.

“And, do you think that your children or the next generation will be better off than your generation economically, worse off than your generation economically, or will they be about the same?”

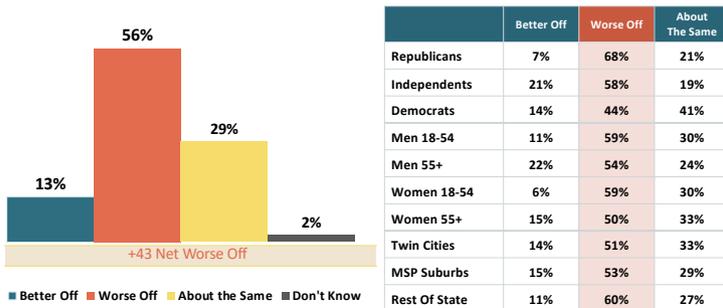


FIGURE 5: Most Minnesotans have had to cut back their family expenses.

“Looking at your family’s expenses, I’m going to read you a list of things some individuals and families have had to do as a result of inflation and the rising costs of goods and services. As I read each one, please tell me whether or not that is true of you and your family.”



FIGURE 6: About three-quarters of young Minnesotans have had to cut back on saving.

% Yes, Impact of Inflation by Age Brackets (50%+ Shaded)

	Ages 18-34	Ages 35-44	Ages 45-54	Ages 55-64	Ages 65+
Put less money into savings	76%	54%	61%	57%	55%
Delayed a major purchase like a new car or appliance	62%	61%	55%	48%	43%
Changed your grocery list or cut back on the groceries that you buy	58%	54%	57%	52%	46%
Cut back on the amount that you drive	56%	52%	56%	45%	50%
Canceled or delayed a vacation	51%	52%	45%	35%	39%
Looked for additional work or sources of income	55%	39%	41%	28%	21%

economically, worse off than your generation economically, or will they be about the same?” responses revealed an underlying pessimism not historically common among Minnesotans. A stunning 56 percent of Minnesotans expect their children to be worse off than they are, while only 13 percent expect a more prosperous future for the next generation.

Why are Minnesotans uneasy, not to say despondent, about the future? In part because they are being squeezed by a rising cost of living and declining real wages. We asked our respondents whether they had taken various cost-saving measures as a result of rising inflation. The results indicate that the cost of living is inflicting real hardship on Minnesota’s families.

“This survey highlights the fact that Minnesotans are feeling the squeeze of inflation. Not only is it affecting their month-to-month finances, but they are increasingly pessimistic about the type of economy they’re passing onto their children,” says pollster Rob Autry, president of Meeting Street Insights.

Sixty percent say they have put less money into savings, a reality that is especially worrisome for would-be first-time home buyers, generally younger Minnesotans and those with families. Fifty-three percent have delayed a major purchase like a new car or appliance, while 53 percent have cut back on groceries and 52 percent are driving less than they used to. Forty-four percent say they have canceled or delayed a vacation, and 36 percent have looked for additional work or other sources of income. For Minnesota’s families, the rising cost of living is an ever-present reality that contributes to the anxiety we see in our poll results.

Along with economic concerns, the *Thinking Minnesota* Poll finds a worrisome loss of confidence in state and national institutions. Minnesotans have never been considered an anti-establishment lot — on the contrary — so the lack of confidence expressed by respondents is remarkable.

Minnesota’s colleges and universities score the best, with 58 percent expressing either a great deal of confidence, or quite a bit of confidence, in them. But even that figure is less than a rousing endorsement. Thirty or 40 years ago, the level of confidence surely would have been higher. Meanwhile, 40 percent say they have not much confidence, or no confidence at all, in the state’s higher education institutions.

And it is downhill from there. Local institutions are next in the confidence rankings, but with mediocre scores. City councils are slightly positive at 53 percent confidence and 46 percent lack of confidence, but school boards are under water at 47 percent confident, 51 percent not confident.



Figure 7: Close to half of Minnesotans have had to do at least four of these cutting back measures.

Look At How Many of These Minnesotans Have Had To Do Because of Inflation

Two of the Hardest Hit Groups

	All Minnesotans	Ages 18-34	Non-College Voters
Have Not Done Any Of These (0 out of 6)	17%	9%	12%
Have Done Only One Of These (1 out of 6)	14%	4%	12%
Have Done Two Or Three Of These (2 or 3 out of 6)	26%	37%	22%
Have Done Four Or Five Of These (4 or 5 out of 6)	29%	29%	35%
Have Done All Six Of These (6 out of 6)	14%	21%	19%
Have Done At Least Four Of These	43%	50%	54%

Minnesotans lack confidence in their state’s judicial system, too, with only 46 percent expressing a great deal or quite a bit of confidence, while 50 percent say they have not much or no confidence in our courts. Why are they held in low esteem? We suspect it is because of their seeming unwillingness to sentence violent criminals to meaningful prison terms. Minnesotans from across the state are feeling the consequences of rising violence, and data show this is due mostly to repeat offenders.

When it comes to federal regulatory agencies like the Food and Drug Administration, Environmental Protection Agency and Federal Trade Commission, the results reflect a disastrous loss of confidence. No doubt, even a decade or two ago, a large majority of Minnesotans would have approved of the work of these agencies. But not today. Only 37 percent expressed confidence in these regulatory agencies, while a large majority, 62 percent, said they have little or no confidence in them.

This result is perhaps especially noteworthy: After two years of the COVID epidemic, Minnesotans have lost confidence in the public health establishment. Only 36 percent expressed confidence in America’s public health establishment, while 62 percent said they have little or no confidence. That is a brutal result for a group of purported experts who have been in the spotlight since 2020.

Finally, the perennially unpopular Metropolitan Council brings up the rear, with a 26 percent confident/62 percent not confident split. You might think that this negative consensus would lead to a trimming of the Council’s powers, but so far that hasn’t happened.

With elections in the offing, we asked how much confidence respondents have in the integrity of elections in Minnesota. Most Minnesotans express a lot of confidence (42 percent) or quite a bit of confidence (23 percent). But a substantial minority, 35 percent, say they have not much, or no confidence in Minnesota’s election integrity. While some have tried to rule such concerns out of bounds, those who lack faith in our electoral processes are by no means a fringe element.

The term “kitchen table issues” entered the popular lexicon in the late 1980s. They are those issues that have the greatest impact on voters and their families and usually reflect the general mood. So, on the eve of the midterm elections, the public mood in Minnesota is somber. Minnesotans are pessimistic about the future, hurting because of the rising cost of living, and have largely lost confidence in many of our state and national institutions. It will be interesting to see how these concerns manifest themselves at the ballot box. ★

FIGURE 8: The only two institutions where we find confidence above 50% are the state’s universities and local city councils.

“Now, I’d like to read you a list of institutions and please tell me how much confidence you have in each one. Would you say you have a great deal of confidence, quite a bit of confidence, not much confidence, or no confidence at all?”

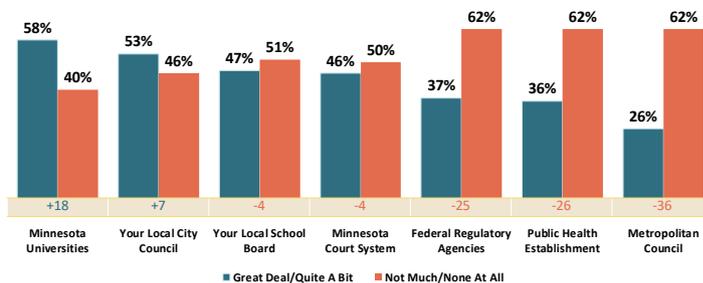
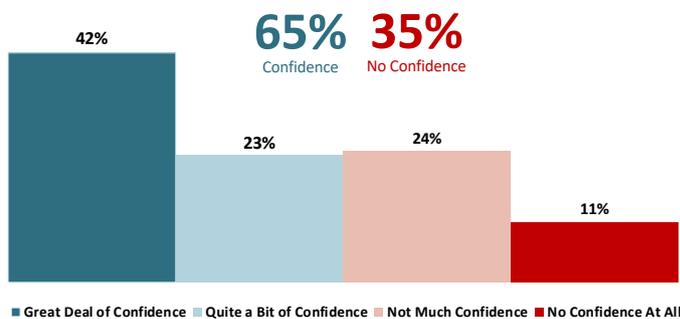


FIGURE 9: Two-thirds of Minnesotans are generally confident in the state’s elections.

“And, how much confidence do you have in the integrity of elections here in Minnesota? Would you say you have a great deal of confidence, quite a bit of confidence, not much confidence, or no confidence at all?”



NOTHING TO SEE HERE

Minnesota's elected leaders can't gaslight their way out of the state's persistent problems.



John Hinderaker

The price of a chronic lack of honesty is loss of confidence in institutions.

We are living in a golden age of gaslighting. Our president tells us there is zero inflation, when in fact it is running at over eight percent. He says our southern border is secure, as millions of illegal immigrants stream across it.

The same happens here in Minnesota. Our governor tells us over 80 percent of children missed fewer than 10 days of school due to COVID shutdowns, when in fact most public schools were closed for over a year. And he claims that Minnesota has the fourth-lowest crime rate in the United States, when Minnesota — for the first time in its history — has a serious crime rate that is higher than the national average, and an overall crime rate that puts us in the bottom half of all states in terms of public safety.

Then, too, our establishment assures us that our elections are secure and cheating is rare if not impossible, even though basic measures like voter identification are absent, and a heavy reliance on mail-in voting opens the door to abuse.

Happy talk of this sort is often called gaslighting. Political figures (and sometimes journalists) tell us to ignore the evidence of our own experiences and supplant them by tossing out false “facts.” Many modern-day politicians apparently subscribe to Groucho Marx’s famous line: “Who you gonna believe, me or your lying eyes?”

Can politicians really make us forget about expensive gas and groceries, high crime rates, and so on by asserting a fantasy version of reality? Our current *Thinking Minnesota* Poll suggests that the answer is no. Minnesotans trust their eyes.

Regardless of what our president tells us, Minnesotans know the cost of living has risen dramatically because we experience it in our own

lives. Our poll indicates that large numbers of Minnesotans have had to alter spending habits because now they can’t buy things that were affordable just a short time ago. Likewise, the assertion that Minnesota is still relatively crime-free — as we generally have been throughout our history — fools no one. Homicide is running at near-record levels, and break-ins and carjackings have become a daily phenomenon. It seems, too, that local news media often join politicians in trying to downplay the crime problem.

Gaslighting can be a problem even when hardly anyone falls for it. If our government’s attitude is, “Inflation? What inflation?” Or, “Crime? What crime?” it tends to shut down debate over solutions. That, probably, is what our rulers have in mind.

But the price of a chronic lack of honesty is loss of confidence in institutions. The number of Minnesotans who express trust in our institutions is shockingly low, according to our *Thinking Minnesota* Poll. Government regulatory agencies, local school boards, Minnesota’s judicial system, the public health establishment, and the Metropolitan Council have more Minnesotans expressing a lack of confidence than confidence in those institutions.

And, while most Minnesotans express confidence in our state’s election systems, a substantial minority — 35 percent — say they lack such confidence.

In the current election season, we need a vigorous debate about the serious issues that blight the quality of living for citizens across the state. We need our elected officials to stop gaslighting, acknowledge the realities that Minnesotans face, and join the conversation about how we can best overcome these problems. Only then can we begin to cure what ails us. ★

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