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THINKING MINNESOTA



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WINTER 2023
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OFF THE CLIFF



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policy hazards
that will push
Minnesota
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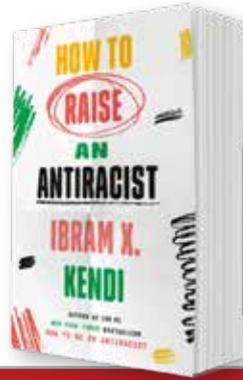
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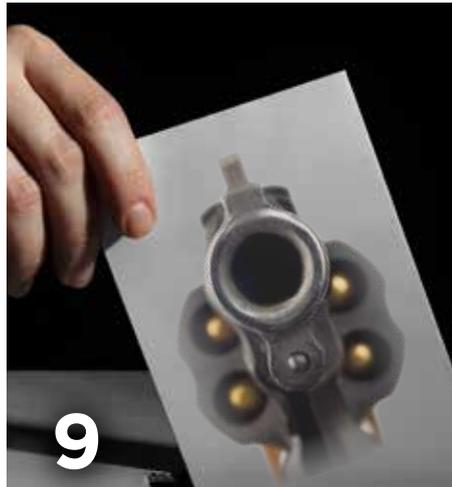
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DOWN BUT NOT OUT

Now is the time to focus on holding lawmakers accountable to all Minnesotans.

After the Union forces in the Civil War had suffered 7,000 casualties during the first day of the Battle of Shiloh, William Tecumseh Sherman found Ulysses Grant resting beneath a large shade tree. “Well, Grant, we’ve had the devil’s own day, haven’t we?” Grant replied slowly, “Yes. Lick ’em tomorrow, though.”

Conservatives in Minnesota have suffered many slings and arrows over the decades and each loss has a particular poignancy and is cause for evaluation and recalibration. The recent midterm elections felt particularly disheartening to me, to many readers of *Thinking Minnesota*, friends, and to supporters of American Experiment. As the fall *Thinking Minnesota* Poll showed, many Minnesotans have a deep sense of uncertainty in their future and lack the usual optimism the state is known for. Only one out of three voters expressed a high level of optimism about the future. Many families are struggling with high inflation; they have reduced the amount of money put into savings accounts — particularly young Minnesotans; they have concerns about the escalating crime rate — not only in the Twin Cities metro area, but the lawlessness and disorder creeping into the suburbs and rural areas. In a September MPR/*Star Tribune*/KARE11 poll, likely voters named jobs, the economy, and crime as their top concerns.

These are issues that will not go away overnight or just because elections have been held. The real work begins now. During the campaign, Gov. Tim Walz made a lot of promises to Minnesotans. He ran on having “One vision for Minnesota,” and



Ron Eibensteiner

that he’s “working to move Minnesota forward.” Well, voters gave him that chance and now he must prove his worth behind the rhetoric.

There is no better organization to hold Walz, his administration, and the Democrats in the state legislature accountable than Center of the American Experiment. Our policy fellows have been at the front lines since we started, not just highlighting the issues that matter to Minnesotans and their families, but advocating and proposing positive solutions for the state to optimize quality of living, happiness, and prosperity. And we have no plans to stop now.

In response to Walz’s plans for 100 percent carbon-free electricity in the state by 2040, policy fellow Isaac Orr and policy

analyst Mitch Rolling released their report “The High Cost of 100 Percent Carbon-Free Electricity by 2040,” in which they detail the enormous financial cost to Minnesota families and businesses in the amount of \$313 billion by 2050, not to mention the potential for energy blackouts in the midst of our frigid winters. Their groundbreaking energy modeling has garnered requests from states across the country looking for straightforward and honest analysis of green energy mandates.

Perhaps the most significant event in Minnesota’s recent history is the COV-

There is no better organization to hold Walz, his administration, and the Democrats in the state legislature accountable than Center of the American Experiment.

ID-19 pandemic and subsequent emergency policies. Walz continually vaunted his administration’s policy response and continues to boast about his leadership skills and positive impact on the overall health of the state post-pandemic. But our research tells a different story. Policies have consequences — very costly ones to Minnesotans, especially those with school-aged children. Economists John Phelan and Martha Njolomole’s September report looked at the actual economic

cost to families for the government shut-down through data-driven analysis and showed that states that instituted harsher lockdown policies (such as Minnesota) fared worse than more “free” states. And the damage to kids in public schools is nothing short of devastating.

As a companion piece to the economic costs, policy fellow Catrin Wigfall investigated the impact that school lockdowns had on Minnesota’s public school children. The effects were especially

There is too much at stake, too many taxpayers who are angry about their hard-earned money being stolen — especially when it was done in the name of “helping children.”

devastating to minority kids and those attending schools in disadvantaged communities. Wigfall’s eye-opening report has been abridged and can be found in this issue of *Thinking Minnesota*. This is yet another example of how far from excellence Minnesota’s public schools have fallen at the hand of the Walz administration, which seems to care more about pleasing the teachers’ union than the quality of education being provided to Minnesota’s youth.

Nothing more exemplifies pandemic mismanagement and the need to keep Walz, Attorney General Keith Ellison, the Minnesota Department of Education, and legislators accountable than the Feeding Our Future scandal. It isn’t just American Experiment reports exposing the holes in political promises and slogans. Adjunct policy fellow Bill Glahn has been on the story from the very beginning, even as every major local news outlet all but ignored it. But keeping the nation’s largest COVID-related fraud out

of the headlines is hard to do when public federal indictments are involved. And rest assured, we will not let up. There is too much at stake, too many taxpayers who are angry about their hard-earned money being stolen — especially when it was done in the name of “helping children.” American Experiment is committed to finding the answers Minnesotans deserve.

Rising crime — everything from murder to carjackings — has permeated daily life in the Twin Cities and now extends to the far reaches of the state. Walz campaigned on “creating safer communities for all Minnesotans” and committing to an increase in spending to help local governments with law enforcement and first responder efforts. But this newfound rhetoric in support of police and law and order should be taken with a healthy dose of skepticism, especially after his public statement after the police shooting of Duante Wright, before all the facts were known. He tweeted on April 11, “I am closely monitoring the situation in Brooklyn Center. Gwen and I are praying for Daunte Wright’s family as our state mourns another life of a Black man taken by law enforcement.”

The election of Mary Moriarty as the new Hennepin County Attorney will also be watched closely. Our latest crime initiative, “It’s Official: Minnesota is Now a High Crime State,” and our Criminal Injustice tracker — which highlights the consequences of soft-on-crime policies — will make it tough for lawmakers and public policy officials to avoid accountability.

Altogether, American Experiment has been and continues to be the biggest ally to hard working Minnesotans and families trying to create a better life in the state, and the fiercest foe to those trying to weaponize partisan political agendas, gain personal enrichment, or avoid accountability at the expense of the citizenry. We may have lost the battle this day, but we are still in the fight today — and tomorrow. ★

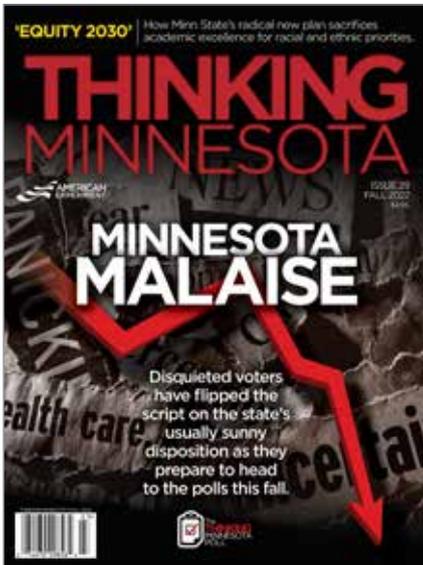


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MIA

> I didn't find any letters in the latest issue. What is the reason? No letters received? Not enough space due to more pressing topics? Hidden so I can't find them? Or?

I find the letters interesting. I guess I should get off my soapbox and contribute some letters.

*Ron Wood
Waseca, MN*

Rules of the game

> In the *Thinking Minnesota* Poll we learn that about two-thirds of voters would support a three strikes law for violent crimes committed with a firearm. This three strikes notion is fundamentally flawed. Everyone on the planet knows these crimes are wrong; why would anyone need to be reminded of that, three times?

Three strikes is a baseball analogy, and in baseball, the player needs three strikes because if he had only one there would hardly ever be any base runners. Scores would be painfully low, games would be very short duration, and the game wouldn't be very interesting. Given three strikes the player

has a much better chance of succeeding at what he is trying to do, which is get to first base and then maybe steal second.

If we gave the criminal only one strike his game would also be of short duration but given three strikes, like the baseball player, he has a much better chance of succeeding at what he is trying to do and when he gets to first, you know for sure he will steal second.

In the final analysis we know that a high percentage of violent crimes are committed by repeat offenders. That alone should tell us that three strikes for criminals is a bad idea. We don't need a three-strike law we need a one strike law. One strike — game over — final score: Justice 1; Criminal 0.

*Earl Faulkner, Sr.
Edina, MN*

Polling the opposite

> I'm reading your fall edition, specifically the polls about how voters feel and if they are optimistic about the future of Minnesota, among other things.

I have a question, about a future poll. I can't understand why — if they feel the country and the state are not going in the right direction — then why do the voters continue to vote for the same politicians, the same policies, etc. that are taking the country and state in a direction they do not like?

I would love to see the answers to that.

*Wayne Cassibo
Clearbrook, MN*



Tom Mason

Fond farewell

> Mr. Mason,

Thanks for convincing Ron and John to agree to your vision of a magazine, and for delivering so well on your promise. *Thinking Minnesota* is well-thought, well-written, and very well-designed. It delivers.

You've earned your retirement and here's trusting that you and your wife can make good mischief together.

I'll look forward to Jenna Stocker carrying on your collective vision through the pages of *TM*. I must, however, take issue with your paean to Benjamin Franklin's successful medium. He would never have thanked the chairman for "loaning" his column. The proper verb is to lend. No more "thumb-sucking" temporarily convenient language, please.

But I will happily keep reading quarterly and enjoying *TM's* refreshing professionalism while you enjoy your marital mischief. ★

*John Ehlert
Sarasota, FL (Edina & Emily,
MN in summer)*

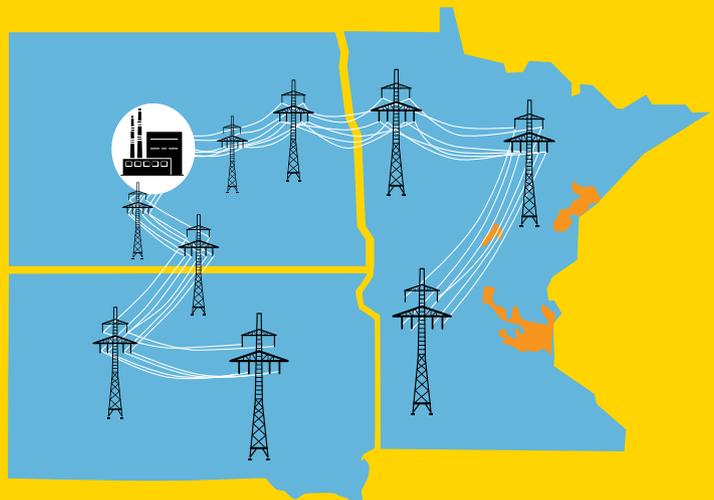
Stenvig legacy

> I wanted to thank John Phelan for writing this article, one of the best overall I have seen on my dad. Accurate and fair are two words I have not used often when describing something I have read about him, so I wanted to just express my appreciation.

*Todd C. Stenvig
Shoreview, MN*



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UP FRONT

Criminal Justice

REPEAT OFFENDERS

During an historic rise in violent crime, did Minnesota voters just ask for more of the same?

Crime and public safety issues were reportedly of high concern to Minnesota voters this election cycle. The crime problem that had exploded in our state in recent years was supposed to be a solidly persuasive issue that tipped the scales against the likes of Gov. Tim Walz, Attorney General Keith Ellison, Hennepin County Attorney candidate Mary Moriarty, and others.

Inexplicably, voters who have all felt the negative and corrosive effects of crime in some way went to the polls on November 8 and said, “I’ll take more of the same, please.”

In their first four years in office, Walz and Ellison managed to decimate law enforcement in Minnesota. While we should hold police officers accountable, Walz’s and Ellison’s response to officer-involved deadly force incidents involving people of color has been to vilify an entire profession. In doing so, they have amplified anti-police rhetoric, which has destroyed police morale and crippled recruitment and retention. As a result, all future public safety efforts will be built around an undermined police profession with a weakened foundation.

What are the other, less visible effects of Walz’s policies? Look no further than the Minnesota Sentencing Guidelines Commission, made up largely of Walz appointees. This group has been quietly weakening, rather than strengthening, our sentencing policy, making it less likely that convicted criminals receive prison sentences. In fact, district court judges have set three consecutive records for the highest level of dispositional departures from prison commitments in our state’s history.

As Walz begins his second term, our prison incarceration rate ranks 48th lowest in the nation at 132/100,000. The national average is 303/100,000. This weak incarceration rate stands in stark contrast to the fact that in 2020, our Part 1 crime rate exceeded the national average for the first time in our state’s history.

Mary Moriarty, who most recently served as Hennepin County’s Public Defender, has vowed to make reforming the Minneapolis Police Department her top priority, despite the job’s primary purpose of prosecuting criminals.

Unfortunately, Moriarty’s election is part of an insidious movement across

the nation to install progressives into public prosecutor roles. Prosecutors have a great deal of discretion in deciding what crimes they prosecute, whether they demand bail, and the terms of plea agreements. They have the power to turn the system on its head by making policy decisions that benefit offenders.

In an admirable move prior to the election, a sizeable number of senior assistant Hennepin County attorneys went public in their opposition to having Moriarty lead the office. Moriarty’s election will likely have devastating effects on personnel in the Hennepin County Attorney’s Office, on police-prosecutor relations, and on Hennepin County’s ability to control crime. Moriarty’s performance must be intently monitored and robustly evaluated.

Going forward, conservative opposition to progressive-led policies and bills related to public safety will be limited, and we could all pay a heavy price because of it.

Improved public safety was on the ballot, and the electorate chose the status quo. Ouch. ★

— David Zimmer

Boosting the Numbers

Why the state's economic outlook isn't as rosy as the Walz administration makes it seem.

It was Minnesotan Sinclair Lewis who popularized the word “Boosterism” in his 1922 novel *Babbitt*. A century later, the spirit of the novel’s protagonist George F. Babbitt is alive and well in our state, thanks in no small part to the Walz administration’s selective use of economic data to give a false boost to its “success.”

On October 9, Gov. Walz tweeted: “Our small businesses and working families are driving our state’s economic expansion.”

But the most recent data show that Minnesota’s economy *isn’t* expanding. According to the Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA), in the second quarter of 2022 our state’s economy actually shrank, in real terms, at an annualized rate of 1.3 percent, faster than the overall rate for the United States (0.6 percent) and faster than 29 other states and the District of Columbia. For both our state and the nation, this was the second successive quarter in which the economy *shrank* in real terms — BEA estimates for the third quarter show real gross domestic product (GDP) of the United States increasing at an annual rate of 2.6 percent, driven almost entirely by lower imports and higher government spending.

Until recently, two quarters of declining GDP would have been called a recession, but not

anymore. Those who deny that the United States — and Minnesota — were in recession in the first half of this year, point to the labor market.

On October 21, Walz tweeted: “Minnesota has the lowest unemployment rate in the nation and one of the highest labor participation rates in the country — that’s what our administration has done.”

But the unemployment rate is a statistic of limited importance on its own. It tells you what share of those in the labor force are unemployed *and looking for work*. If you give up looking, you are no longer counted as part of the labor force and cease to count towards the unemployment rate.

That is what has happened in Minnesota. Bureau of Labor Statistics numbers show that out of the 50 states and

D.C., no jurisdiction has seen its number of unemployed fall more than Minnesota’s from February 2020 — the pre-pandemic peak for employment in the United States — to September 2022, with a decline of 49.8 percent. But our state is also one of 23 out of 51 jurisdictions that had fewer people employed in September 2022 than it did in February 2020, by 0.8 percent. Where have all those unemployed people gone? Out of the labor force. The number of Minnesotans not in the labor force was 10.2 percent higher in September 2022 than it was in February 2020, a rise of 133,000, the seventh largest increase in the United States. In short, Minnesota’s low unemployment rate is not driven by more Minnesotans being gainfully employed, it’s driven by people leaving the workforce altogether.

So while Lt. Gov. Flanagan is correct when she tweets that “Minnesota has hit *12 straight months* of job growth,” that is not the same as saying that the number of people employed has grown. Indeed, Minnesota is one of 27 out of the 51 jurisdictions where the number of people employed *fell* from June to September 2022, by

18,500 — a performance worse in percentage terms than in 45 other states. That is why our participation rate fell from 67.3 percent in June to 66.7 percent in September. Fewer Minnesotans are working but are taking more jobs to make ends meet.

This is why so many of them are galled to read arguments like those of DFL Chair Ken Martin, who tweeted on October 20: “Americans at every income level are wealthier today... The average wage & salary income rose from \$68,943 to \$73,988 — an increase of \$5,045/person, or 7.3%” from January 2021 to August 2022.

These numbers take no account for inflation which was 14.3



percent over this period so, Americans' average wage and salary income actually *fell* in real terms by \$3,572.

BEA data for Personal Income illustrate how inflation is hitting Minnesota wallets. In the second quarter of 2022, the most recent quarter for which we have data, Personal Income in Minnesota rose by 5.4 percent at an annualized rate, lower than in 28 other states. Adjusting that for inflation and population, however, shows that Personal Income in Minnesota actually *fell* for a fifth successive quarter. Indeed, if we strip out income from transfers to look just at sustainable incomes — that were derived from wages and capital — we see that per capita

Inflation is ravaging
living standards across
the country, but
Minnesotans are being
hit especially hard.

Personal Income began falling in real terms in the U.S. in the fourth quarter of 2021, but in the second quarter of 2021 in Minnesota. While sustainable per capita Personal Income for the United States is now 0.4 percent lower in real terms than it was in the fourth quarter of 2019, in Minnesota it is now 1.8 percent lower. Inflation is ravaging living standards across the country, but Minnesotans are being hit especially hard.

The economy is the number one issue for Minnesotans right now because they are living with the grim reality of falling incomes. The boosterism of Walz, Flanagan, and Martin isn't fooling them and pretending the state's situation is different than it is won't solve any problems. The people of our state deserve straight talk and serious solutions, not "Babbity." ★

— John Phelan



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News of Note in Minnesota

Center events, initiatives, and policy work.



Former congresswoman Tulsi Gabbard speaks to a sold-out crowd at the Center's Fall Briefing in October.

Fall Briefing

American Experiment's Fall Briefing took place in Waconia on Saturday, October 15. The event at the Winery at Sovereign Estate featured former congresswoman and presidential candidate Tulsi Gabbard as keynote speaker. She gave an impassioned speech to a sold-out crowd about her decision to leave the Democratic Party, the changing nature of U.S. foreign policy, and the dangers of Big Tech and the censorship of speech. This issue of *Thinking Minnesota* features her Q & A with Center president John Hinderaker.

(Mis)Education

Following his American Experiment lunch forum presentation in Bloomington on September 23, eminent historian, author, and professor Dr. Wilfred McClay detailed his findings of Minnesota's proposed K-12 social studies standards in the new Center report, "Minnesota's Academic Standards

Among the Nation's Worst." In the report, Prof. McClay breaks down the revised standards, detailing both the pervasive influence of Critical Race Theory and the appalling lack of basic factual knowledge that students need to be informed citizens. McClay's expert and independent review of the standards arrived in Minnesota at

an important time in the rulemaking process.

Senior policy fellow Katherine Kersten and policy fellow Catrin Wigfall and have been prolific in exposing the politicization of Minnesota's public schools and the influence of radical progressive activism in academic courses.

Wigfall's October 7 report, "The Cost of Lockdowns

and Shutdowns: Part II. How school closures became a policy decision that held Minnesota students hostage" is featured in this issue and highlights the damage done to Minnesota's students as a result of the COVID-19 school closures. All American

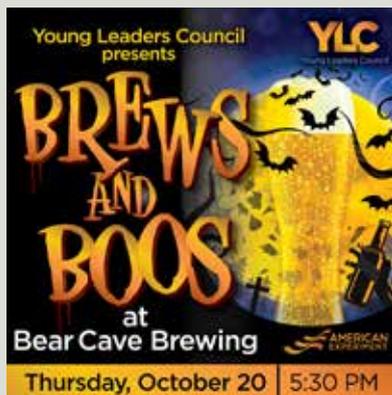


Experiment reports can be downloaded from the Center's website (AmericanExperiment.org).

On October 27 at the Community Center Cafetorium in New Ulm, Kersten presented, "Weaponizing History." She explained how organizations like the Minnesota Historical Society and the Minnesota Department of Education are using history as a vehicle to advance a self-interested political agenda, specifically the simplistic, one-dimensional tale of "good Indians" and "evil settlers" — converting our state's history into a sordid, shameful tale of oppression and genocide.

Solid reporting

Adjunct policy fellow Bill Glahn continues to expose the details in the Feeding Our Future COVID free-food distribution scandal. He hosted a webinar about the fraud on September 28. A video of Glahn's presentation, and recordings and clips from various events are available for viewing at the Center's website (AmericanExperiment.org/multimedia).



A time to celebrate

On October 20 at Bear Cave Brewing in Hopkins, American Experiment’s Young Leaders Council hosted the annual Halloween party. The tradition provides an opportunity for young conservatives to gather in an informal, relaxed atmosphere to share experiences and network with each other. YLC also held the annual holiday party on December 8 at Edina’s The Lynhall No. 3945. The sold-out event included food, drinks, a picture booth, and game tickets.

American Experiment’s Owatonna chapter hosted “An evening of thankfulness and courage.” The event on November 29 at Torey’s Restaurant and Bar featured an inspiring presentation from Waseca police officer Arik Matson and his wife Megan. They shared with attendees their story of recovery after Arik Matson was shot in the line of duty in January 2020 leaving him with a traumatic brain injury.

On December 5, American Experiment’s Mankato chapter hosted their annual Christmas party. The event at Swiss & Madison featured Kendall Qualls, president of TakeCharge Minnesota. American Experiment continues its outreach initiatives by hosting events in Greater Minnesota and through its chapters in Rochester, Duluth, Owatonna, and Mankato. To join a chapter or start one in your town, contact Greater Minnesota Outreach Director Micah Olson at [Micah.Olson@AmericanExperiment.org](mailto:Olson@AmericanExperiment.org).

Stay informed

Readers of *Thinking Minnesota* can find daily updates on American Experiment’s activities and initiatives at AmericanExperiment.org. Also, sign up for exclusive bonus content, request a speaker, and shop for merchandise. ★

American Experiment Update

News in North Dakota

Energy campaign, taxes, and school choice top the agenda.

Following policy fellow Isaac Orr and economist John Phelan’s report, “Energy Leadership: How American energy production can make the world safer,” American Experiment North Dakota produced a state-of-the-art production in support of the state’s oil and gas industry. The full-length video runs approximately 50 seconds and features drone footage of energy production facilities as well as testimony from North Dakotans. It can be viewed on the website at AmericanExperimentND.org/multimedia as well as the Center’s YouTube and Facebook pages.

The initiative also includes statewide radio spots, and billboards are up in Fargo, Grand Forks, Bismark, and Williston. A petition is available for signing at SupportNDOilandGas.com urging leaders to continue to support North Dakota oil and gas with sound public policy.

Jennifer Benson, American Experiment North Dakota’s executive director says, “North Dakota’s oil and gas industry supports more than 60,000 jobs in the state. The industry is vital to our economy, adding nearly \$4 billion in state and local tax revenues. I’m proud of the work we are doing here at American Experiment North Dakota to educate the public on the importance of supporting our state’s oil and gas industry.”

American Experiment North Dakota hosted an energy press conference in Fargo with State Sen. Curt Kreun in October. The same energy policy was discussed in Bismark, where the speakers included Lt. Gov. Brent Sanford, Public Service Commissioner Julie Fedorchak, and President of the North Dakota Petroleum Council Ron Ness.



Economist John Phelan has two new policy briefings related to taxes in North Dakota. Both reports, “A Plan for Corporate Tax Reform in North Dakota,” and “Eliminate the North Dakota Marriage Penalty Tax,” were released December 15. Tax reform is a top priority for 2023, as is school choice.

Following successful stops in several North Dakota cities educating residents about Critical Race Theory in schools last summer, policy fellow Catrin Wigfall is spearheading a school choice initiative with Benson. “My biggest passion is in advocacy work,” Benson says. “I’ve never backed down from defending our constitutional rights and the freedom of North Dakotans, and I’m thrilled to lead American Experiment North Dakota in that fight.”

Details of the campaign will be announced in the coming weeks. Readers of *Thinking Minnesota* can find more information about this and other American Experiment North Dakota events, reports, and initiatives at the Center’s website: AmericanExperimentND.org. ★



Light Rail Fail

Federal data shows Twin Cities light rail is the most dangerous in America.

People who decide to step on light rail in the Twin Cities are at greater risk of being injured by an assailant than any other light rail system in America. Data from the Federal Transit Association (FTA) shows serious crime on Twin Cities light rail has been consistently higher than the U.S. average in recent years. However, the Twin Cities light rail crime rate surged in 2019, grew even worse in 2020, and remains persistently high today.

This dramatically higher rate of crime and injury on Metro Transit light rail reveals years of mismanagement. This mismanagement only adds to Metro Transit's embarrassing delays and cost overruns with the Southwest Light Rail Transit project. With this record of failure, Minnesota lawmakers need to seriously reexamine the future of the Met Council that runs Metro Transit and the ongoing expansion of light rail.

Background

Federal law requires the FTA to maintain a National Transit Database to sup-

port planning efforts, make multi-year comparisons and perform trend analyses. Part of this data collection tracks personal security events, which includes assault, homicide, robbery, larceny/theft, motor

**Metro Transit
accounted for 40 percent
of personal security events
on light rail while carrying
only four percent
of passenger miles.**

vehicle theft, rape, and suicide. Because the FTA maintains a uniform method of collecting and reviewing the data, it represents the best source for comparing light rail systems.

Personal security events must meet a certain reporting threshold of injury to be counted. This includes a fatal-

ity, a serious injury such as a fracture or severe hemorrhage, or any injury requiring transport from the scene for medical attention. These thresholds effectively limit the data to only major events where victims were injured during a crime. Thus, the number is much smaller than the total amount of crime reported by law enforcement agencies.

Importantly, this focus creates a more apples to apples comparison to determine where crime leads to the most severe injuries — the sort of crime people fear most. The data presented here excludes suicides to further narrow the focus on injuries people suffer when they are victimized by another person committing a crime.

The data

Overall, this data shows Metro Transit has consistently operated one of the most dangerous light rail systems in the country since 2014. The following figure shows the rate of people injured by an assailant on Metro Transit light rail was substantially higher than the national

average from 2014 to 2018. However, this rate soared dramatically higher than any other light rail system in the country in 2019. That year, the rate of people injured per billion passenger miles leapt to 1,164. That represents a 254 percent increase from the previous year. This rocketed the rate to 6.7 times higher than the national average, making crime on Twin Cities light rail an extreme outlier in the country.

Looking at the number and proportion of personal security events occurring on Metro Transit light rail is maybe more shocking. The number of personal security events jumped from 33 in 2018 to 117 in 2019. That's twice as many as the next closest light rail system. That's also 40 percent of all personal security events that occurred across America's 22 light rail systems. Putting that in context, Metro Transit accounted for 40 percent of personal security events on light rail while carrying only four percent of passenger miles.

If all the personal security events from 2014 to 2021 were aggregated, and then compared the Twin Cities rate of personal security events to every other light rail system over this time period, we find the Twin Cities is by far the highest — nearly twice the rate of Houston, the next closest city.

Comparing both the number and rate of personal security events between light rail and bus transit in the Twin Cities, in each year, both the number and rate of personal security events on light rail exceeds buses. However, light rail experiences a much steeper increase in the number and rate in 2019.

The analysis here reflects crime on light rail systems in America, and therefore excludes crime on heavy rail transit like New York subways. Metro Transit should strive to meet the standards of light rail systems, which are more similarly situated. That said, the results would be no different if heavy rail were added. When accounting for the much larger number of riders who use heavy rail, the rate of personal security events on Metro Transit light rail far exceeds any heavy rail system. In 2019, only New York City Transit (453) and the Chicago Transit Authority (135) reported a higher number of personal security events on rail compared to Metro Transit (117).

Management failure

The dangerous conditions that Metro Transit allows to fester in their light rail system has certainly not gone unnoticed. Several news reports account for not just the increase in crime, but the increase in nuisance behavior that makes

the current light rail network uncomfortable to ride, to say the least. An October 2022 article by Janet Moore in the *Star Tribune* documents the experiences of riders who witness drug use, smoking, partying, mental illness, homelessness, vandalism, and even sex.

The news story framed this as a problem of “perception” which creates a “narrative” that “works against Metro Transit’s efforts to bring back passengers lost during the COVID-19 pandemic.”

However, the federal data shows this is a problem with reality, not perception. It shows the reality light rail riders face in the Twin Cities is far different and far more dangerous than other cities. This is not a marketing problem. This is a management problem.

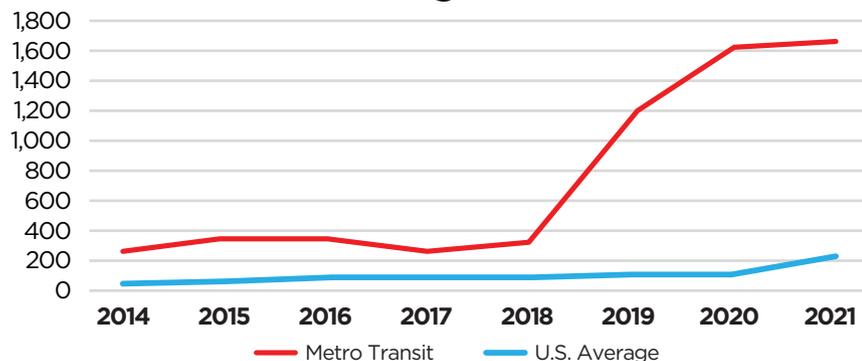
The *Star Tribune* story admits the current perceptions of light rail raises questions about whether transit is being effectively managed. If there were still a question, then the data presented here provides a clear answer: the Met Council has failed to provide a safe and comfortable experience for light rail riders.

Though the data shows a dramatic spike in personal security events on Metro Transit light rail in 2019, this was not when the problem started. Beginning in 2014, the data shows that Metro Transit light rail experienced the highest rate of personal security events in every year except 2016 and 2017. This shows the failure started under the leadership of Gov. Dayton and only grew worse when Gov. Walz took over.

The reality of failed management and severe safety issues raises some obvious questions. Should we continue expanding the region’s light rail network? Will enough riders use the delayed and over budget Southwest Light Rail Transit line to justify finishing the project? Should the Met Council continue to govern in its current form? These are important questions for the legislature and governor to answer. ★

—Peter Nelson

Light Rail Personal Security Events per Billion Passenger Miles



Source: Federal Transit Administration, National Transit Database, Safety & Security Major Event Time Series Data. Passenger-mile data are not yet available for 2021, so they were estimated by multiplying the average passenger-miles per trip in 2020 (broken down by mode and agency) by the number of trips carried in 2021 from the NTB Monthly Module Adjusted Data for July 2022.



The additional costs resulting from adopting the California Fuel Standard in Minnesota would increase yearly costs for Minnesota families and businesses by \$210 to \$568 per household.

Amir Aziz / Shutterstock.com

Elections Have Consequences

What Minnesotans can expect from Democrat-led environmental policies.

On Election Day, Minnesota Democrats won the Governor's mansion, the House of Representatives, and the State Senate, giving the DFL total control of the legislature for at least the next two years. This Democratic trifecta will almost certainly have important implications for energy policy, including regulations on the cars we are able to purchase in the future and the fuel we put in them.

California car mandates

Gov. Walz's reelection means Minnesota will enact California's regulations requiring auto manufacturers to deliver a certain number of Zero Emission Vehicles (ZEVs), which essentially means electric cars, to the state. Auto dealers would be required to stock approximately 14,000 vehicles in Minnesota once the rules go into full effect.

However, it is important to keep in

mind that the regulation requiring electric vehicles to be stocked in Minnesota would only be in effect for one year because California has updated its ZEV mandates to *ban* the sale of new internal combustion engines in 2035.

Under the Clean Air Act, states must either follow federal environmental standards or California's standards. There is no federal ZEV mandate, which means Minnesota would either need to adopt California's ban on selling new gas and diesel-powered engines or allow the current electric vehicle mandates to expire after one model year.

Looking forward, it seems unlikely that liberals in the state legislature would pass a law requiring Minnesota to adopt California's ban on selling new gas engines in the next two years because such a move would be out of step with what the electorate expects

them to do. In the winter 2022 *Thinking Minnesota* Poll, nearly three-quarters of voters opposed following California's ban, with 51 percent strongly opposing it. Our most current poll in this issue echoes that sentiment.

However, the legislature will almost certainly pass legislation that opens the door for the Walz administration to adopt these rules in the future by clearly granting the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) the authority to adopt California's gas engine ban through the administrative rulemaking process.

Time will tell if the Walz administration will decide to enact California's ban on the sale of new gas- and diesel-powered engines, but unified Democratic control will almost certainly mean the Walz administration, or any future administration, will be able to impose these rules if and when they decide to do so.

Gas prices

Democrats will likely push to enact a California Fuel Standard (CFS) in Minnesota, which will increase gasoline prices. But before considering the consequences of this policy, it helps to

take a step back to examine the major factors that affect gas prices. Overall, gas prices are driven by the global forces of crude oil supply and demand and refining capacity, which allows for crude oil to be manufactured into useful products like diesel fuel, gasoline, and jet fuel.

There is little that Minnesota can do to influence global supply because Minnesota is not an oil-producing state. However, Minnesota is a major corridor for crude oil imports from Canada, and more pipelines and refining capacity could help boost supplies and put downward pressure on prices.

What is the standard?

The California Fuel Standard regulations originated (you guessed it) in California, where the policy is called a Low Carbon Fuel Standard (LCFS). The CFS is a complicated cap-and-trade system created by the government aimed at lowering emissions of greenhouse gases (GHGs).

Under the regulations, the government sets a limit on the permissible amount of greenhouse gases that can be emitted by transportation fuels, which is called a Carbon Intensity (CI) score for fuels sold in the state, with the regulations becoming stricter

every year.

As the regulations become stricter, the cost of complying with them increases. An analysis from Stillwater Associates determined that the LCFS increased California's gas prices by 22 cents per gallon in 2020.

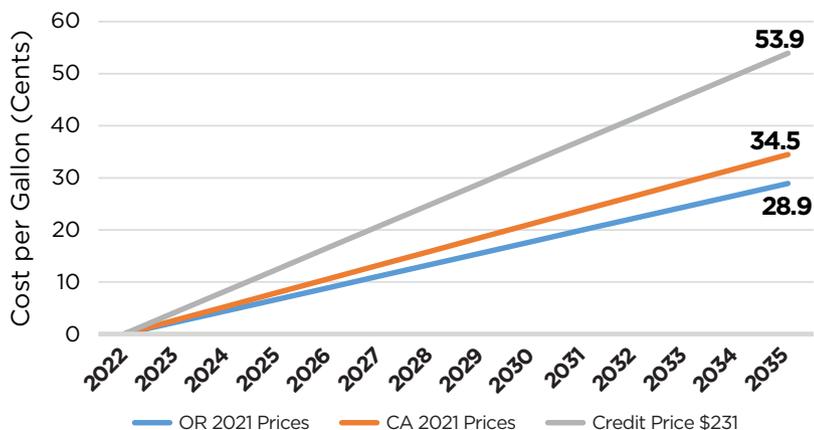
In our March 2022 report, "Gas Station Inflation," American Experiment used the formula provided by the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality to estimate the impact enacting a CFS would have on Minnesota gas prices. We determined that gas prices could increase between 29 and 54 cents per gallon by 2035 as a result of the program.

The additional costs resulting from adopting the California Fuel Standard in Minnesota would increase yearly costs for Minnesota families and businesses by \$210 to \$568 per household. Rural households will likely experience higher costs because they tend to drive further than urban and suburban households.

It is uncertain whether this bill will pass into law. The DFL holds the State Senate by a slim, one-vote majority, and this is due to victories in a handful of seats in Greater Minnesota that will be crucial to retaining control of the legislature in the coming years. ★

—Isaac Orr

Minnesota CFS Potential Additional Cost per Gallon



Source: Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, CARB

It's our surplus
GIVE IT BACK

\$17.6 Billion

GivItBackMN.com

AMERICAN EXPERIMENT

TOM STEWARD

THE LIMITS OF POWER

Legislative term limits have found a new following in North Dakota.

Term limits used to be one of the go-to issues in the conservative playbook. Thirty-seven states now restrict a governor's time in office. But the movement for *legislative* term limits peaked in 2000 with 21 states on board, losing ground ever since. Over the years, six states have actually rescinded automatic retirement for lawmakers through the courts or legislative action, leaving just fifteen states with legislative term limits on the books — until now.

On November 8, it wasn't even close when North Dakota became the first state in two decades to approve limiting how many terms state legislators, as well as the governor, may remain on the job by adding an article to the state constitution. By a roughly 2-to-1 margin, North Dakotans voted to restrict lawmakers to eight total years in both the state house and senate, in addition to prohibiting a governor from serving more than two four-year terms.

In fact, the biggest battle wasn't convincing a majority of residents to support the constitutional amendment, but rather securing Measure 1 on the ballot in the first place. Questions were raised about the citizen initiative process used to collect the required 31,164 signatures to qualify for the election. North Dakota Secretary of State Al Jaeger rejected 29,000 of 46,000 submitted signatures due to concerns over some signatures and other suspected irregularities. But in September, the North Dakota State Supreme Court unanimously ruled Measure 1 should go before the electorate.

Term limits organizers portrayed the grassroots campaign as David versus



Tom Steward

Goliath, despite receiving about \$900,000 in outside funding from the Washington, D.C. advocacy group U.S. Term Limits. A *Bismarck Tribune* analysis found that nearly half of legislators — 66 of 141 — had been in office more than eight years with 28 of them serving 20 years or more.

The constitutional amendment that took effect on January 1 turns the clock back on lawmakers who've previously served, stipulating all state representatives and senators will start from scratch. Supporters insist term limits will shake up the political establishment and bring state government closer to the people by bringing fresh faces to the table at the state capitol.

"This is a huge win for the everyday people of North Dakota," said Jared

Hendrix, chair of North Dakota for Term Limits in a statement. "Voters are smart when it comes to term limits, because common sense tells us that no one needs endless decades in government to make a difference. They innately understand the status quo is lopsided in favor of the political class. Term limits might be inconvenient for the lobbyists and political class, but they will just have to adjust."

A powerful coalition of businesses led by the Greater North Dakota Chamber, lobbyists and elected officials from both parties, however, opposed the measure on the grounds it was a solution in search of a problem. They pointed out that some 70 percent of state legislators have stepped down or been voted out of office in the last decade.

"GNDC believes that term limits already exist — they are called elections," GNDC spokesman Amanda Remyense told *American Experiment*. "Poor actors should be called to task by their constituents and their votes have consequences. Term limits constrain democratic ideals, forcing government into election and limiting choice to those selecting their representation."

Critics also raised concerns about the loss of institutional knowledge under term limits and potential impact on the quality of policy and legislation. But the measure's opponents didn't ramp up until well after the state high court's September surprise.

"This measure was approved for the ballot by the ND Supreme Court late in the game after disputes of questionable signature collection," Remyense said. "Additionally, GNDC needed marching orders from our Board of Directors —

business leaders across the state.”

The practical impact of term limits on legislation is hard to quantify. Yet some warn there’s a danger the departure of veteran legislators could, in practice, lead inexperienced legislators to rely more on lobbyists and experts with deeper knowledge of the issues and process. Thus, instead of bringing government closer to the people, term limits may strengthen the hand of lobbyists, particularly in a state where its biennial legislature meets just four times in an eight-year term.

But what about the turnover rate in the other 15 states with term limits for lawmakers? In 2022, 86 state senators and 166 state representatives were no longer eligible for office due to term limits — a total of 252 members, ac-

By a roughly 2-to-1 margin, North Dakotans voted to restrict lawmakers to eight total years in both the state house and senate, in addition to prohibiting a governor from serving more than two four-year terms.

ording to *Ballotpedia*.

There’s probably a ceiling, however, on how many more states will turn to term limits down the line. All but two of the 21 states that have approved term limits at some point have done so through citizen initiative. That process allows citizens to bypass the legislature, putting proposed constitutional amendments or laws directly before voters. Yet only 24 states have the citizen initiative process on the books, most of which have already addressed the issue one way or another.

Nevertheless, term limits for North Dakota state lawmakers and the governor appear to be set in stone. Measure 1 specifically prohibits the state legislature from amending or repealing the amendment. ★

dp THE DENNIS PRAGER SHOW

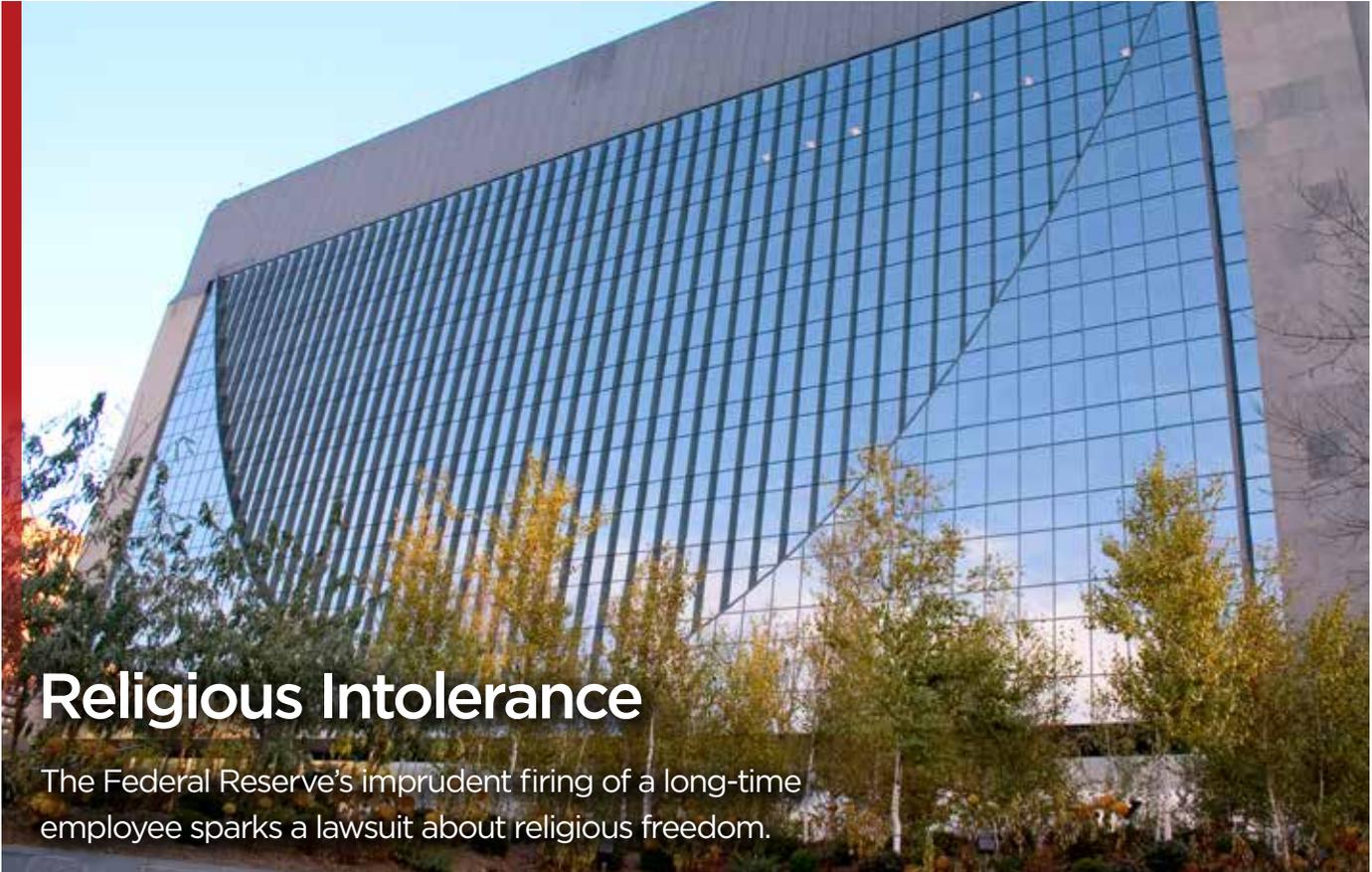
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Religious Intolerance

The Federal Reserve's imprudent firing of a long-time employee sparks a lawsuit about religious freedom.

Steve Sikold / Shutterstock.com

After serving the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis for nearly 24 years, Officer Rodney Maki is suing his former employer for religious discrimination. He was fired in January 2022 for failing to receive a COVID-19 vaccine.

“They said you’ll have a choice, either get the vaccination or you’ll be fired. You’ll be terminated,” Maki told *Alpha News*.

Each of the three vaccines offered to him at the time — Johnson & Johnson/Janssen, Pfizer/BioNTech, and Moderna/NIAID — involved the use of aborted fetal cells in their manufacturing or testing, according to the lawsuit. As a Catholic, Maki felt it would be “morally unacceptable” to receive a vaccine “that has used cell lines from living persons, killed by the harvest of their organs for use in medical research and production

processes,” according to his request for accommodation.

At first, the Fed accommodated Maki’s exemption, provided that he wear a mask, practice social distancing, did not eat in the cafeteria, and did not use the onsite fitness center. But when other employees started returning to the office after working remotely, the Fed revoked his temporary exemption, arguing that accommodating him would create an “undue hardship.”

After asking about other employment opportunities, including a switch to the night shift, and questioning the reasons for ending his exemption, Maki was placed on unpaid leave and then terminated in January 2022. As an instrumentality of the federal government, the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis is subject to both Title VII of the Civil

Rights Act and the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, both of which protect employees against religious discrimination. Title VII requires employers to accommodate sincerely held religious beliefs as long as doing so does not create an “undue hardship,” as the Fed claimed.

The employer also has a duty to follow an “interactive process” with the employee to find possible alternative positions or accommodations, which Maki argues the Fed failed to do. Email exchanges show vague responses from Fed leadership to Maki’s questions and proposed solutions, all of which were eventually denied.

Just weeks after his termination, the Upper Midwest Law Center (UMLC), a nonprofit, public interest law firm, filed a charge of discrimination with the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) on Maki’s behalf. Once

the EEOC granted him the “right to sue,” UMLC filed a federal complaint against the Fed, citing Maki’s rights under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act and the Religious Freedom Restoration Act.

“The Bank’s termination of Maki was intentional discrimination, with malice and reckless indifference to Maki’s rights,” the lawsuit states. “Because Maki’s religious beliefs prevented his receiving a COVID-19 vaccination, the Bank’s Vaccine Policy imposed on Maki the choice between violating his religious beliefs or else being terminated and losing his livelihood.”

Now Maki awaits the Federal Reserve Bank’s response and a court date. He’s

Email exchanges show vague responses from Fed leadership to Maki’s questions and proposed solutions, **all of which were eventually denied.**

seeking reinstatement at his former job, monetary damages, and a declaration from the Court that the Fed violated his religious freedom.

“If there is one attribute that Officer Maki exemplifies, it is faithfulness,” says James Dickey, Senior Trial Counsel for UMLC. “He faithfully served the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis for nearly 24 years. He remained faithful to his religious convictions as well, and he stood up for what he believes to be right. The Bank discarded his faithful service in support of an ideological position that never had a solid scientific basis. We expect the Court, and eventually a jury, to recognize that this religious discrimination is wrong and compensate Officer Maki for the harm he has suffered.” ★

—Grace Bureau



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Move Over, Dr. Spock

Ibram X. Kendi wants parents to raise ‘antiracists.’

“There is no such thing as a ‘not racist,’” writes professor of humanities at Boston University Ibram X. Kendi in his book *How to Raise an Antiracist*. One is either a racist or an antiracist. For caregivers, the intended audience of this book, this then shapes their children’s concept of race and whether they will be raised as “antiracist” kids, according to Kendi. “We must keep our individual children safe in this racist society, while building an antiracist society that can protect all our children.”

Published June 14, 2022, this book concludes much like Kendi’s other works: Differences between racial groups exist because of racist policies. This one just purports to tell you how to raise your child to come to Kendi’s same conclu-

sion.

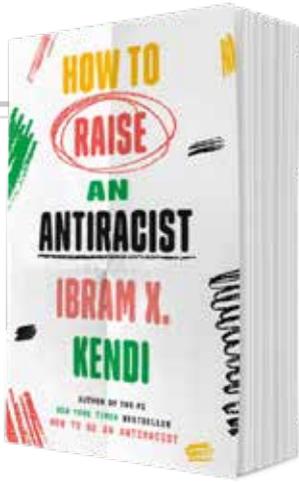
But the book’s title is a bit misleading — there is no real direction, nor tangible steps on how to accomplish raising an antiracist outside of mentions of exposing children to people from a variety of backgrounds, various cultures, literature, etc., which is advice that has been around for quite some time.

Paired with an overabundance of rhetorical questions, *How to Raise an Antiracist* reads largely as a personal memoir, with Kendi focusing on examples of how his parents, teachers, and society failed him and his brother — failed him by not raising him to be antiracist and by being racist. He also includes his experiences with fatherhood and the parenting mistakes that come along with that journey,

Kendi limits every racial disparity in the U.S. to racism, viewing every inequality and social disparity through a race-based lens.

which as a new parent, I appreciated him confessing his vulnerability.

Parents, and more broadly “caregivers,” which Kendi identifies as all the people “nurturing the environments, experiences, minds, bodies, souls, and futures of children,” must be “active” about raising kids to be antiracist — making race central to their worldview — or they perpetuate a racist society. But this overarching theme is reductive. Kendi limits every racial disparity in the U.S. to racism, viewing every inequality and social disparity through a race-based lens. This overly simplistic and limiting perspec-



But included in Kendi's tendency to be dogmatic is a perspective that could help change how we discuss race: **That there is nothing behaviorally superior or behaviorally inferior about any racial group.**

tive doesn't help us find solutions to the challenges society still faces today.

According to Kendi, to raise a child to be antiracist is to raise a critical thinker, and to raise a critical thinker is to raise an antiracist. To become a good critical thinker, one needs "to be inquisitive on a range of issues, to trust the reasoning process of questioning and investigating and discovering and complicating, to be open to different thoughts and informed opinions, to be able to understand those differing opinions," and "to be capable of suspending or changing one's own thinking on a topic."

Yet Kendi himself limits racial disparities to a single variable, making his solutions as simple as his diagnosis of their cause. But there are limits to binary thinking. And it's unfortunate the book leaves little room for insightful discussion or debate on disparities and their causes, from analyzing socioeconomic class, education levels, workforce participation, etc., and understanding racism, a sensitive conversation to begin with.

While Kendi does at times appear

to break from his black and white thinking — mentioning that there is this basic fact of our common humanity, the importance of teaching children to view others as individuals, that we shouldn't judge a human being by his or her skin color — he quickly jumps right back into reinforcing racial categories, seeing skin color before humanity. "Parents are taught to fear their kid going to school with too many Black children," Kendi writes. "Teachers are taught to fear a classroom with too many Black children."

A couple chapters on, Kendi makes a great point about how teachers should have "the same high expectations for all students no matter their identity," but then muddies it with his lens of race in a subsequent chapter. "White teachers should make sure their high expectations for all students don't stop them from recognizing when a child of any race may have a disability... At the same time, teachers of color should not assume that they don't need to be antiracist or anti-ableist, too."

But included in Kendi's tendency to be dogmatic is a perspective that could help change how we discuss race: That there is nothing behaviorally superior or behaviorally inferior about any racial group.

This is what true antiracism should be focused on — deracializing behavior. "The way you accomplish that is by refusing to ascribe behavior, whether vice or virtue, to skin color," writes Delano Squires for 1776 Unites.

There is no denying work remains to live up to our country's founding principles. And it will take teaching our next generation of leaders to be critical thinkers. But that critical thinking cannot be a narrow and limiting worldview, or we risk exacerbating the problems we need to solve. Our work must prioritize first teaching our children how to stand for truth, goodness and beauty and not just to despise badness. ★

—Catrin Wigfall



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It's the Incentives, Stupid

Why well-intentioned government policies to help the poor often fail.

In November 2021, St. Paul residents voted to pass one of the strictest rent control policies in the country. Advocates argued that rent control would halt spiraling housing prices and improve stability, especially among low-income renters of color. But the ink was barely dry in the capital city when developers started pausing projects and renters faced imminent rent hikes. The policy has since been loosened to make it more accommodating to new housing supply — albeit only slightly.

But the damage has already been done. Since the passage of the ordinance, St. Paul has seen its building permits plummet, while its neighbor Minneapolis

has seen the opposite. And while some developers are ready to get back into the market after these changes, others have left for good, reasoning that the changes were not enough incentive to resume planned projects. The result? St. Paul renters will have to contend with fewer housing units, and with it, higher prices.

But this example isn't exclusive to rent control. Too many times, well-intentioned lawmakers advocate for a policy to help some disadvantaged group. But in the end that policy ends up hurting the people it is intended to help.

The minimum wage is another well-tested example. Proponents claim that raising the minimum wage pushes

workers *out* of poverty. Yet evidence indicates that in most cases, raising the minimum wage costs workers — especially the young and low-skilled — their jobs, pushing them further *into* poverty. To the extent that workers do not lose their jobs altogether, they might get their work hours cut, or end up with unreliable schedules.

Nowhere is the harm of minimum wage increases more evident than in the Twin Cities. According to research produced by the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, after both Minneapolis and St. Paul passed ordinances to gradually raise the minimum hourly wage to \$15, job losses occurred, especially in the

restaurant industry which almost exclusively employs low-skilled workers.

Incentives matter

Why is this the case? Certainly, helping the poor is a noble cause, but the reality is that in the free market, people generally act in their own self-interest. This is not to be mistaken with being selfish. Instead, what economists mean by self-interest is that economic agents are only likely to undertake economic activity when it profits them or make them better off.

The landlord does not rent out a house to be nice, but rather to make money, which he or she uses to spend on other needs and wants. Similarly, businesses do not hire workers out of charity. They get value from employees who produce output, enabling them to make a profit. In the same way an employee does not work just to pass the time, but rather to exchange his or her skills and time for income.

If a company offers too low a wage in comparison to a worker's skill, that employee would likely quit and find a better paying job. And if an employer finds that hiring a worker would cost more than the employee's skills are worth, the employer will likely not hire that person. And if a landlord knows they won't make money by renting a house, they will likely not invest in housing.

We live in a world with finite resources. However, we have infinite wants and needs, so we must decide how to efficiently and effectively allocate these resources — be it time or money. Profit is the incentive that drives where and how people invest their time and money.

That is, as long as there is a profit to be made in doing so, landlords will invest their time and resources to increase housing supply — which will lead to lower prices — and employers will invest time and resources to hire workers — which will raise wages. It is in their self-interest to do so.

Policies like minimum wage hikes

and rent control increase costs for landlords and employers, making it hard for them to turn a profit, which then discourages housing production and hiring. This inadvertently hurts the low-income individuals these policies were intended to help in the first place.

Consider, for example, a teenager whose skill-level only allows him to produce output worth \$10 per hour. If the minimum hourly wage is \$15, an employer would be losing \$5 every hour by employing him. It would not be worthwhile to employ such an individual.

As Adam Smith wrote, "It is not from the benevolence of the butcher,

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the brewer, or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own self-interest. We address ourselves not to their humanity but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessities, but of their advantages."

People only invest in providing a good or service when there is a profit to be made. Well-intentioned as they might be, most government policies to help the poor — like rent control and minimum wage — disincentivize profit. And that is why they not only don't work, but often lead to disastrous unintended consequences since they limit productive economy activity. ★

—Martha Njolomole



It's a discussion. Not a lecture.

Legalize Marijuana?

Saturday January 14, 2023

"Should Minnesota Legalize Cannabis for Commercial Sales?"

Ken Winters, PhD, Research Advisor
to SAM (Smart Approach to Marijuana)

Universal Health Insurance?

Saturday February 11, 2023

"Fixing how we pay for health care after everything else has failed"

Anne Jones, RN, Health Care for All

Is Caffeine a Drug?

Saturday March 11, 2023

Dr. Vanashree Gadani, Aryurvedic Physician

Child Protection – Are we getting it right?

Saturday April 8, 2023

Traci LaLiberte, Executive Director,
Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare,
Uni. of Minnesota

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Public Safety

Letting Them Off Easy

Courts are skirting important sentencing guidelines for gun-related crimes.

The Minnesota legislative intent is clear: use a gun in a crime and you will go to prison.

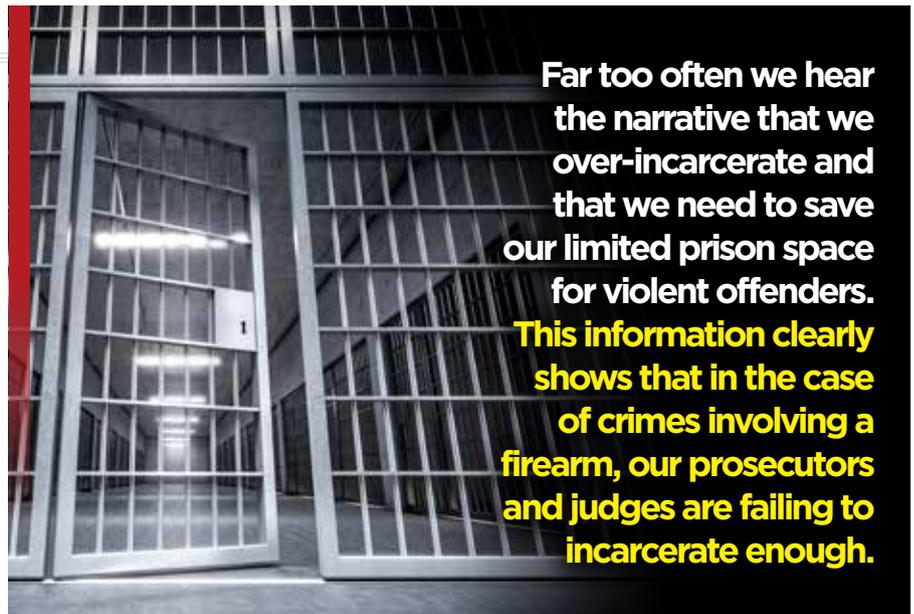
Minnesota Statute 609.11 establishes a mandatory minimum sentence of three years in prison for possessing a firearm during the commission of a long list of crimes. A second conviction mandates a minimum five years in prison.

To emphasize the seriousness of such crimes, the legislature added a “No Early Release” provision to this statute, making those convicted of using a firearm during the commission of a crime ineligible for “probation, parole, discharge, or supervised release until that person has served the full term of imprisonment...”

Finally, in an effort to ensure transparency and accountability, the legislature added a provision to this statute requiring prosecutors to report whether the case was charged or dismissed, whether the defendant was convicted of the offense or a lesser offense, and whether the mandatory minimum sentence required under this section was imposed and executed or was waived by the prosecutor or court.

On its face, 609.11 is tough and is meant to send a resolute message to violent offenders. Unfortunately, that message is being short-circuited in Minnesota by the very entities we rely on to keep us safe — our prosecutors and judges.

Data maintained by the Minnesota Sentencing Guidelines Commission paints a troubling picture of a system failing to hold violent offenders accountable, as directed by law.



A review of data from 2015-2020 on cases in which the offender used or possessed a firearm during the commission of a crime indicates the following:

- There was a total of 3,854 people convicted that met the criteria of being armed or using a firearm in connection with their offense as described in 609.11.
- Despite the law mandating a minimum three-year prison sentence, Minnesota judges departed from a prison commitment in 1,410 sentences, or 36.6 percent of the time.
- Of the 63 percent of these offenders who received a prison sentence, nearly one in five received a “mitigated durational departure,” meaning they received less time than the statute mandated.
- This equates to nearly half (48.5 percent) who the legislature intended to receive a mandatory minimum sentence and who didn’t receive one as prescribed.

How is this possible? 609.11 has a provision that gives prosecutors and judges an out. It reads: “When presented with the motion (from the prosecution), or on its own motion, the court may sentence the defendant without regard to the mandatory minimum sentences established by this

section if the court finds substantial and compelling reasons to do so.” The most common reasons cited by the courts for departing from the mandatory sentences were:

- “Defendant is amenable to probation,” and,
- “Defendant shows remorse/accepts responsibility.”

In about *half* of the departures the prosecutors either didn’t object or made the motion to depart themselves. In about a *quarter* of the cases the prosecutor objected to the departure, and in the remaining cases the position of the prosecutor was not known.

Far too often we hear the narrative that we over-incarcerate and that we need to save our limited prison space for violent offenders. This information clearly shows that in the case of crimes involving a firearm, our prosecutors and judges are failing to incarcerate enough.

If the Minnesota legislature was serious about violent crime, it would address this issue by reducing the opportunities for sentencing departures. Sadly, we have seen the priorities of the incoming legislative majority, and they seem more focused on issues like legalizing marijuana use than keeping citizens safe. ★

—David Zimmer

Economics

Flunking Out

Minnesota underperforms in terms of economic freedom.

Just recently, the Fraser Institute released its newest edition of the Economic Freedom of North America Index — a yearly publication that ranks U.S. states and provinces of Mexico and Canada on economic freedom. The index, which focuses on six areas, seeks to measure how different state governments (at the subnational level) and national governments in North America restrict economic freedom.

The areas the report focuses on are as follows:

1. **Government spending:** The more the government spends as a proportion of income, the less room there is for private choice.
2. **Taxes:** Taxes are a burden that restrict economically productive activity. Taxes have a negative relationship with economic freedom.
3. **Regulation:** Stringent regulations — be it in the labor market, credit market, or general business regulations — restrict private choice reducing economic freedom.
4. **Legal system and property rights:** Secure property rights and a sound legal system are fundamental to protecting economic freedom.
5. **Sound money:** Stable money provides the basis for productive economic activities, especially long-term planning. Unstable money increases costs of doing business, thereby infringing on economic freedom.
6. **Freedom to trade internationally:** Limiting international trade limits voluntary exchange, thereby reducing

economic freedom.

In the United States, some components of this index, like sound money and international trade, are mainly controlled by the federal government, so state policy has little impact. This also includes other subcomponents of the index like the credit market.

States do, however, have a strong influence on things like spending, taxes, and regulations — factors that significantly affect their respective economic environments.

How Minnesota ranks

The most recent year for which comprehensive data is available for comparison is 2020, the year the Fraser Institute reports on. And according to the report, compared to other North American regions, Minnesota ranked fairly well on economic freedom in 2020, ranking as the 46th freest region out of 92 total subnational regions.

However, in the United States, Minnesota was among the *least* free states — ranking 39th among the 50 states and Puerto Rico. This is

consistent with Minnesota’s historic performance. Between 2000 and 2020, for example, Minnesota has generally scored significantly below average on this freedom index.

In recent years, no serious reforms have been made on the state’s regulatory environment or spending and taxes, which could have improved Minnesota’s standing. In fact, Minnesota performs particularly poorly on taxes, seconded by government spending — both of which have only grown over the years.

Moreover, this is not the first study to rank Minnesota poorly on economic freedom. Last year the Cato Institute ranked Minnesota 38th in the country for personal and economic freedom. And going even further back, in 2009 the Mercatus Center at George Mason University ranked Minnesota 31st for both economic and personal freedom. Minnesota’s performance on economic freedom has only worsened over the years.

Why Minnesotans should be concerned

Economic freedom affects economic growth. High levels of economic growth incentivize productive economic activity, raising income levels and standards of living. As one chart in Fraser’s Economic Freedom Index shows, there is a positive relationship between growth in income per capita and economic freedom.

That is, as economic freedom grows in these two areas, income also grows.

Minnesota’s abysmal performance on economic freedom is therefore a big threat to the growth of the state’s economy and our standard of living. ★

—Martha Njolomole





The statue of Nellie Stone Johnson was unveiled in the State Capitol before a crowd of onlookers, the media, and Gov. Walz.

Jemima Stocker

Selective Memory

Out with Columbus, in with the communists.

On November 21, Gov. Tim Walz dedicated a new statue of Nellie Stone Johnson at the State Capitol. The press fawned over the ceremony, calling her an “iconic civil rights and labor leader.” They never mention her time in the Communist Party in Minnesota in the 1930s and ‘40s, because that would be inelegant.

Nellie Stone Johnson was a prominent leader of the Democratic Party in Minnesota. She was there with Hubert Humphrey when they merged the Democratic Party with the Farmer Labor Party. She served on the Democratic National Committee for two terms in the 1980s.

Like many early DFL leaders in Minnesota, Stone Johnson was also a card-carrying member of the Commu-

nist Party. Communists were front and center in the battle for control of the labor movement in the 1930s and were still prominent in the ‘40s when the DFL was formed.

According to her 2000 biography titled *The Life of an Activist*, Stone Johnson once spoke at a Lenin Memorial Meeting and lamented the fact that she had to step away from the Communist Party for political reasons: “My association and philosophical beliefs with those parties, the belief within me, was true, but my bottom line was always about jobs and education. I was getting a lot of questions... I wanted to get everybody off my back was basically it.”

So how are Minnesotans in 2022 supposed to judge a political figure in

the 1930s? Is it fair to associate her with the millions of Russians killed by Lenin in the name of communism? Are we to consider the context of the times? Surely the brand of communism practiced by Stone Johnson and other labor and DFL leaders in Minnesota wasn’t the same as Stalin and Lenin, right?

Were Christopher Columbus’ sins considered in the context of the time he walked the earth when Walz and Lt. Gov. Peggy Flanagan stood by and allowed his statue to be torn down by vandals? Of course not.

Most of the speakers at the ceremony talked about her activism and organizing skills, either in the labor movement or DFL politics. Is political activism deserving of a statue at the Capitol?

Meanwhile, the statue of Columbus remains in cold storage somewhere with his pedestal sitting empty.

Walz said at the ceremony, “We need to tell our inclusive and whole history of who we are.” Except for the communist part, or the Columbus part. Don’t look for Stone Johnson’s time in the Communist Party to be mentioned in any of the press accounts.

If you’re looking for someone who actually made an impact on the national and world stage during this time, familiarize yourself with Walter Judd. Judd was a Congressman from Minneapolis who spent his career fighting communism after serving as a missionary to China as a young doctor. When he arrived in Washington in 1943, Judd instantly became a leader on foreign affairs and became a trusted advisor to every president from Truman to Reagan. He received the Presidential Medal of Freedom from President Reagan in 1981.

With four more years of Walz-Flanagan, don’t hold your breath for the unveiling of Walter Judd’s statue in the Minnesota State Capitol. ★

—Bill Walsh

Scandal

Unintended Consequences?

Collateral damage from the Feeding Our Future scandal.

American Experiment has been reporting on the Feeding Our Future scandal for nearly one year — ever since over 200 law enforcement officers raided the offices of the St. Anthony-based nonprofit and related organizations at more than a dozen locations. Since then, there have been thousands of free-food distribution sites registered under the government programs caught up in the scandal. Each one tells a story.

Three categories of sites caught in the scandal's wide net have emerged. All the attention has been paid to the indictments filed in the case primarily showing the massive fraud and criminal deceit at the expense of taxpayers. A much quieter story revolves around the other free-food distribution locations that were doing genuine work and feeding children under difficult circumstances but found themselves suffering consequences of the scandal. For yet another group of locations, where they fall on the spectrum is a bit murkier.

In addition to Feeding Our Future, a second large free-food network — Partners in Nutrition, doing business as Partners in Quality Care — was shut down by Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) in January. They have been suing in both federal and state courts for reinstatement. The state appeal will be heard on February 1, 2023.

Partners has also been appealing decisions by MDE to not pay hundreds of invoices, some dating back to November of 2021.

In fact, Partners in Nutrition has 13 invoices dating from November and December of 2021 that remain

unpaid by MDE, according to state documents. A few appear to be denied because they were submitted by local nonprofits named in the FBI search warrants. Others are lacking proper documentation.

However, MDE has apparently rejected four invoices, from three host sites, because their *food vendor* was mentioned in the search warrants. Not one of the local sites was mentioned by name in any search warrant or any later indictment in the Feeding Our Future case.

The food vendor, S&S Catering, is the subject of the third indictment in the case. This indictment has produced two guilty pleas, to date.

All three hosts with unpaid 2021 S&S invoices have established track records

and have been operating for years. One is a local childcare center, incorporated in 2015 and based on Lake Street in Minneapolis. As of 2022, it is under new management. It is licensed by the Minnesota Department of Human Services and is in good standing, with an approved capacity of 76 children.

The nonprofit Disabled Immigrant Association was established in 2003 in Minneapolis.

The Somali American Peace Council is a nonprofit based in Washington, D.C. It has current IRS tax returns on file and was registered in Minnesota in 2014. Its local office is in Eagan.

The sites registered under Partners in Nutrition with locations in Minneapolis are as follows:

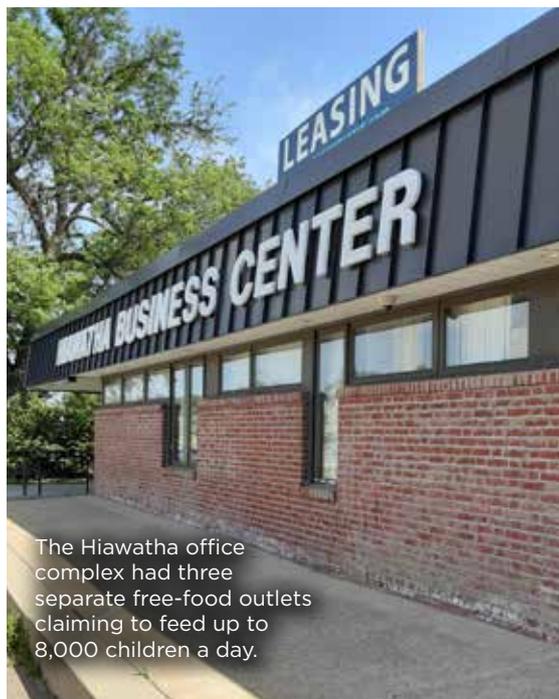
A childcare center operated a site for its enrolled children and a larger summer site for the public. The Peace Council operated three locations. Both the childcare center and the Disabled Immigrant Association are seeking reinstatement to the program through the Partners lawsuit.

Among its three locations, the Somali American Peace Council operated at an address on Pillsbury Avenue. The *Minnesota Reformer* reported the nonprofit's site at that location operated alongside an unrelated site by the nonprofit Action for East African People, serving 600 individuals per day. Both Pillsbury Avenue efforts operated under the sponsorship of Partners in Nutrition.

At one time, the south Minneapolis office complex located at 3355 Hiawatha Avenue had three separate free-food efforts claiming capacity to feed up to 8,000 children per day. All three were operated under Partners in Nutrition.

Hopefully, all of this confusion will be straightened out in court. ★

—Bill Glahn



The Hiawatha office complex had three separate free-food outlets claiming to feed up to 8,000 children a day.



≡ EDUCATION

The Kids Are Not Alright

How school closures became a policy decision that held Minnesota students hostage.

Imagine you are a Minnesota high school student, and this upcoming spring you will graduate. Excitement, nervousness, and even a bit of trepidation fills you. The last years of your high school career have been tough. School closures impacted you academically, socially, and emotionally. Only 36 percent of your 11th-grade class could do grade-level math as of spring 2022. Statewide, fewer than half of Minnesota students are proficient in the subject. Just under 50 percent of students can't read at grade level. As you look to the future, you still don't know how deeply this will impact your life or contributions to society.

Many of us were warning about the potential learning loss and calling for schools to reopen back in September 2020. Since then, state and national data have exposed the consequences of extended school closures.

BY
CATRIN
WIGFALL

What started as a public health intervention soon expanded into a public policy response that brought considerable and unnecessary cost upon our next generation of leaders. And the damage done will not be easily fixed.

In March 2020, Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz shut down the state's public education system. Pausing how school normally operated when COVID-19 first began that spring was an understandable precaution. Not much of anything was known about the virus. But throughout summer 2020 and entering that new school year, data quickly emerged showing that prolonged school closures would have devastating effects on students' cognitive, social, and emotional well-being. Data also began showing that children were at much lower risk for contracting the coronavirus and transmitting it to family members.

But this evidence-based picture did not result in meaningful effort to resume in-person instruction. State guidance and pressure from teachers'



unions continued to prioritize a countermeasure with little health benefit — and significant cost — to school-age children. The excessive caution with school reopening decisions has added to the growing awareness of the failing realities of our state’s education system. As the least vulnerable to COVID-19, children have been hit the hardest by state leaders’ public policy responses.

Politics, far more than science, shaped school district decision-making.

The overtly complicated, arbitrary matrix guiding school districts’ mode

What started as a public health intervention soon expanded into a public policy response that brought considerable and unnecessary cost upon our next generation of leaders.

of learning created much confusion for school leaders, caused districts to shift back and forth between learning models out of uncertainty, and did not offer a particularly promising model of how to ensure all students were provided with a free and appropriate public education.

Health concerns or politics?

The significant tradeoffs of school closures that were known for some time outweighed the unknown benefits.

Studies on the severity of the coronavirus in children were coming out as early as February 2020. A report from the World Health Organization-China Joint Mission stated: “Disease in children appears to be relatively rare and mild with approximately 2.4 percent of the total reported cases reported amongst individuals aged under 19 years. A very small proportion of those aged under 19 years have developed severe (2.5 percent) or



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

critical disease (0.2 percent).”

In March 2020, a systematic review of COVID-19 in children showed milder cases and a better prognosis than adults. Studies from China, South Korea, Japan, and Iran also published in March 2020 on household transmission clusters suggested that children were unlikely to be the source of viral transmission within households.

An April 2020 study published in *The New England Journal of Medicine* showed that less than 1 percent of coronavirus cases were in children younger than 10 years of age. Nearly 1,400 children with contact were then investigated, and 171 were found infected with only three requiring intensive care — all of whom had coexisting conditions.

Another April 2020 study looked at data from the SARS outbreak in mainland China, Hong Kong, and Singapore, which suggested that “school closures did not contribute to the control of the epidemic” and that policymakers needed “to be aware of the equivocal evidence when proposing or implementing national or regional school closures for COVID-19, given the very high costs of lengthy school closures during pandemics.”

A systematic review of literature published in May 2020 and one published in June 2020 proposed that children and school transmission are not major drivers of COVID-19 transmission. Another June 2020 study by Institute Pasteur found no significant transmission of the coronavirus among children or from students to teachers.

A July 2020 report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention listed children under 18 accounting for less than 0.1 percent of COVID deaths in the United States. A literature review also released in July that year looked at studies published from February 2020 to June 2020, noting that children then accounted for 1.7 percent to 2 percent of the diagnosed cases of COVID-19. Later on, the authors write: “While children are not the face of this pandemic, its broader impacts on children risk being catastrophic and amongst the most lasting consequences

for societies as a whole.”

Data from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) & World Bank survey “show no relationship between the extent of school closures and COVID-19 infection rates across countries,” wrote the OECD on July 1, 2022. “This shows



State guidance and pressure from teachers’ unions continued to prioritize a countermeasure with little health benefit — and significant cost — to school-age children.

that school closures were not inevitable but, rather, a policy choice...”

Also noteworthy was the ample guidance available about how to reopen schools safely and the hundreds of schools and school systems that were actually doing so nationwide — including many of the country’s biggest school districts, charter schools, and private schools.

But this didn’t stop teachers’ unions

from blocking school reopening efforts and engaging in political stunts such as fake “body bags” (Washington, D.C.), writing their own obituaries and sending them to governors (Arizona, Iowa), and creating a laundry list of partisan demands in partnership with the Democratic Socialists of America (Minnesota), to name a few.

“Rather than work to open schools safely, the unions are issuing ultimatums and threatening strikes until they are granted their ideological wish list,” wrote *The Wall Street Journal* Editorial Board in August 2020. “Children, who would have to endure more lost instruction, are their hostages.”

National studies released fall 2020 suggested that reopening decisions were driven more by teachers’ union influence than actual safety concerns. Using data on the reopening decisions of 835 public school districts in the United States, Corey DeAngelis and Christos Makridis found that “school districts in locations with stronger teachers’ unions are less likely to reopen in person...when full-time in-person instruction is available as an option to all students.” Additionally, they found no “evidence to suggest that measures of COVID-19 risks are correlated with school reopening decisions.”

Political scientists Michael Hartney and Leslie Finger reached similar conclusions in October 2020, analyzing national data and finding that “politics, far more than science, shaped school district decision-making,” and that “mass partisanship and teacher union strength best explain how school boards approached reopening.”

Learning loss

Data from Minnesota’s reading and math state tests (the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments or MCAs) show



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

school closures have exacerbated academic proficiency challenges among all student groups and much work remains to ensure students acquire basic literacy and numeracy skills. Fewer than half of students statewide are performing at grade-level in math (44.6 percent), and just under 50 percent of students can't read at grade level.

Academic achievement disparities from pre-COVID are largely unchanged — both across racial/ethnic groups and income levels. Nearly 41 percent of white students did not demonstrate proficiency in reading on the MCA, compared with nearly 70 percent of Black and Hispanic students who aren't reading at grade level. Around 53 percent of Asian students, nearly 73 percent of American Indian students and over 51 percent of students who identify as two or more races are not proficient in reading. Math proficiency is even more bleak — nearly 46 percent of white students, 58 percent of Asian students, 78 percent of Hispanic students, nearly 81 percent of Black students, nearly 83 percent of American Indian students, and 60 percent of students who identify as two or more races can't do grade-level math. Low-income white students also significantly trail higher-income white students in academic achievement across Minnesota.

Average American College Testing (ACT) scores among Minnesota's high school graduating class of 2022 are the lowest they have been in at least a decade. Only 28 percent of exam-takers met all four college-readiness benchmarks in math, reading, English, and scientific reasoning, the lowest percentage in at least a decade.

Minnesota student achievement is also measured by National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores. Minnesota students' scores declined across the board in fourth-grade reading, fourth-grade math, eighth-grade reading, and eighth-grade math compared to 2019 but are also the worst in decades.

National studies have identified the negative impacts of distance learning too. *A Harvard University study found that remote instruction was the primary driver of widening achievement gaps.* Students in districts that were in distance

learning longer suffered worse learning loss. Minnesota's high poverty schools — serving predominantly low-income families — spent double the weeks in distance learning in the 2020-2021 school year than the state's low- and mid-poverty schools. Even at low poverty schools — serving predominantly high-income families — the effects of distance learning were negative, with students falling behind growth expectations when schools entered this learning model.



Minnesota students' scores declined across the board in fourth-grade reading, fourth-grade math, eighth-grade reading, and eighth-grade math compared to 2019 but are also the worst in decades.

A National Bureau of Economic Research study analyzed 12 states — including Minnesota — and found that while learning loss was evident across all included states, students in districts that offered less in-person learning had greater declines. Minnesota students in school districts that switched to distance learning over the course of the 2020-2021 school year had greater declines in math compared to their peers in school districts that stayed mostly in-person. Another national study found that Minnesota students in districts with either little or very little in-person instruction experienced the greatest declines in reading proficiency in both spring 2021 and 2022 compared to spring 2019.

Test scores aren't the only indicator

of success, but they play a key role in evaluating learning and indicating how kids are doing. And based on that indicator, the kids are not alright.

Economic impacts

Without mastery of the basics, children will grow up to be less productive and earn less. This has long-term consequences on the human capital and welfare of impacted students, particularly those from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds.

According to the World Bank, school closures could cost children \$21 trillion in earnings over their lifetimes, or equivalent to 17 percent of 2022 global Gross Domestic Product (GDP), reported *The Economist*. If fewer students are graduating with the skills necessary for today's jobs, the economic impact from this will affect all parts of society.

While restrictions loosened and in-person instruction finally became a reality for more Minnesota students, the learning loss from two years of on-and-off distance schooling remains. Since March 2020, prolonged school closures — outside of the understandable necessity of them during the early uncertain months of COVID-19 — have contributed to significant and profound academic learning loss that risks having long-term impacts.

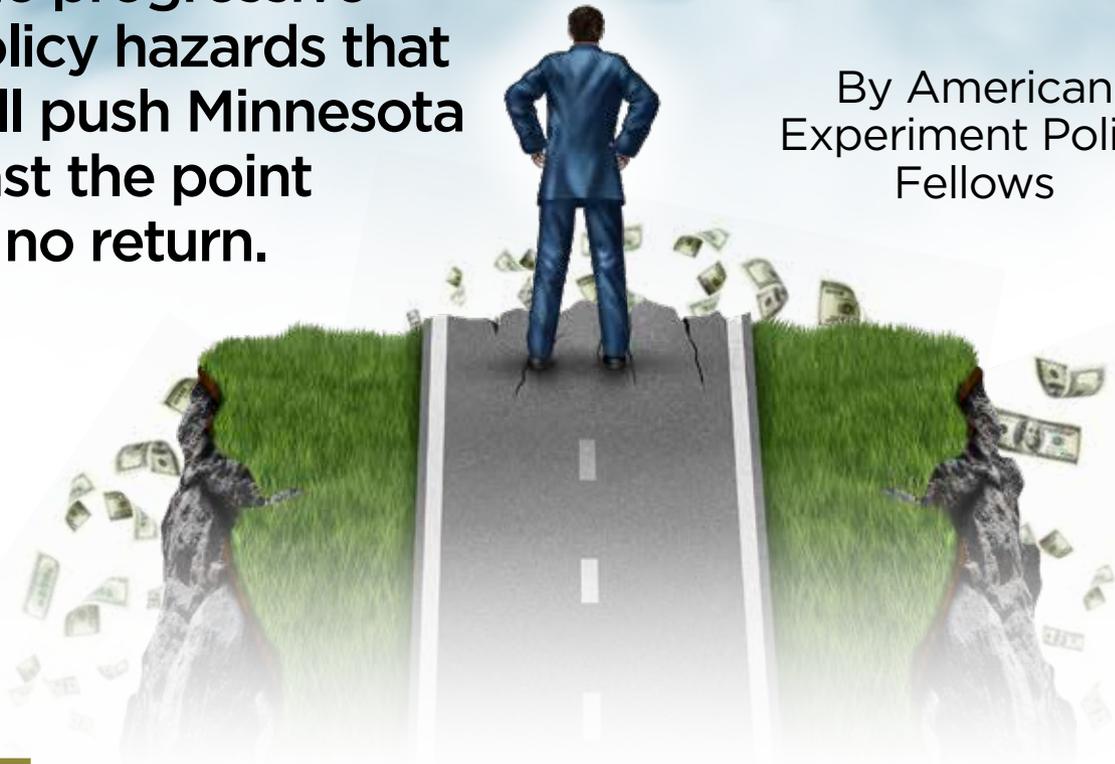
No matter the level of justification for extended school closures, the effects on K-12 education in a broad sense and on our young and most vulnerable generations are devastating and should serve as a call to carefully weigh future policy choices. Districts are still spending the billions in federal relief dollars they received, of which a good chunk is supposed to be dedicated to learning loss recovery.

Finally there is more voiced agreement that school closures have contributed to higher educational inequality and that potential long-term impacts on students have yet to be fully realized. It's unfortunate it took so many students being left behind for that to happen. Will policy-makers learn from this imposed disaster, or will politics continue to take precedence over our kids' futures as we wait to see if they'll ever fully recover? ★

OFF THE CLIFF

The progressive policy hazards that will push Minnesota past the point of no return.

By American Experiment Policy Fellows



The November elections resulted in statewide losses for conservative lawmakers, giving liberal policymakers total control of the government from the Governor’s mansion to the State House of Representatives and the State Senate. Believing they have a mandate, they will not waste their opportunity to push a progressive policy agenda, seeking to fundamentally transform many of the institutions in which Minnesotans used to take pride.

From an exponential increase in

violent crime fed by the revolving door of criminal justice, to the gutting of public school standards, distrust in public health, and an irresponsible tax structure that resulted in a record-setting state budget surplus, it is clear that our civic leaders have failed time and again to heed the concerns of the people. Through our scientific polling, American Experiment has illustrated the undercurrent of unease rising through communities in every corner of the state. Now, liberal politicians and an entrenched bureaucracy are in total

control of the government and are able to wield the levers of power with little political opposition.

But even where politicians have failed to address the serious problems persistently plaguing the state, American Experiment is digging in, ready and able to stand between those whose policies will sink Minnesota into deeper economic woes, public schools that continue to emphasize equity, race, and identity instead of academic excellence, resources wasted on energy policies that will drive up costs for Minnesota

families and increase the risks of rolling blackouts, and open the door to irresponsible spending on social issues that will have profoundly negative consequences for generations to come.

The following issues are almost certain to be on the liberal agenda in the upcoming legislative session. American Experiment has determined these policies must not proceed. If Minnesota is to save itself from falling off the cliff into an economic and societal morass, it is imperative to fight these proposed policies and protect Minnesota families from their inevitable negative consequences.

Energy

Build Back Blackouts:

The DFL Push for 100 percent Carbon Free Power by 2040.

Key DFL policymakers, such as Gov. Tim Walz, House Majority Leader Jamie Long, and Senator Nick Frentz have signaled that passing a 100 percent carbon-free electricity mandate by 2040 would be a top priority for the 2023 session. While this legislation may sound good in theory, in practice it will increase electric bills for Minnesota families and businesses and make the state more vulnerable to rolling blackouts.

In September 2022, American Experiment released a study calculating the cost of this mandate and concluded that requiring the vast majority of Minnesota's electricity come from wind turbines, solar panels, and battery storage would cost the state an additional \$313 billion through 2050, or an average of \$9.2 billion each year. This sum equates to an average additional cost of \$3,888 for each Minnesota electricity customer — residential, commercial, and industrial — every single year.

Adding insult to injury, this proposal would also make the state more vulnerable to blackouts by outlawing the use of natural gas power plants, thereby making us too reliant upon weather-dependent wind turbines and solar panels, and battery “backup” power.

In fact, using real-world wind and solar generation data in our region from the

U.S. Energy Information Administration, American Experiment determined that this energy mix would cause a 55-hour blackout in January 2040 if wind and solar performed as poorly as they did in January of 2020.

In sum, our research shows that the proposals put forward by Walz's Climate Action Framework and previous legislation passed by the Minnesota House of Representatives are completely unworkable, unaffordable, and dangerously irresponsible.



Our research shows that the proposals put forward by Walz's Climate Action Framework and previous legislation passed by the Minnesota House of Representatives are completely unworkable, unaffordable, and dangerously irresponsible.

Thankfully, it appears this reality is beginning to dawn on even the most liberal lawmakers at the capitol. As of preliminary discussions in mid-December, it seems that the liberal energy non-governmental organizations (NGOs) who repeatedly lobby for only wind and solar are conceding that new nuclear power plants need to be part of

meeting this standard, as do the large hydroelectric dams in Canada that already generate about eight percent of Minnesota's electricity.

This nod to sanity is much needed. Our report also estimated the cost of meeting the 100 percent carbon free mandate with a mix of new nuclear plants, large hydroelectric plants, and coal plants with technology attached to capture their carbon dioxide emissions and store them safely underground — known as carbon capture and sequestration, or CCS.

This scenario, which we called the Lower Cost Decarbonization (LCD) scenario would cost “only” \$89 billion through 2050, the equivalent of \$1,039 per electricity customer per year, and would not cause blackouts.

Compared to the original Walz proposal, this plan is a bargain, but Minnesota families are already struggling to pay their utility bills, meaning the average additional cost of \$86 each month per electric customer would still be incredibly difficult to stomach.

Most people think decarbonizing the electric grid will be good for the economy and bring electricity prices down, but states like California and nations like Germany have tried the wind and solar experiment and experienced nothing but rising prices and faltering reliability.

This is why American Experiment is working hard to educate Minnesotans about the enormous costs and immeasurably small benefits of these mandates.

Education

“Fully fund” education without fully understanding academic achievement.

Lobbying for multi-billions more in education spending without more accountability is expected this upcoming session, with Gov. Walz joining the teachers' union in calling to “fully fund” education. But given that the state's multi-year academic track record has very little to show for the influx of cash the education fund has received over the years, more spending accountability is a must before hefty price tags are even

considered.

Hailed as having one of the best public education systems in the nation, the reality of Minnesota's public schools is like the tip of the proverbial iceberg — hidden beneath our seemingly high rankings are educational disparities and shortcomings that have not disappeared despite decades of increased spending. And yet, unrelenting claims by spending advocates and the teachers' union that our education woes are caused by insufficient spending drive policymakers and state leaders to dedicate billions of dollars — and 40 percent of the state's budget — to education funding. But without more accountability, *how much* we spend won't matter if we can't ensure that *how* it's spent benefits students and their academic outcomes.

Take, for example, what was discovered two years ago from the Office of the Legislative Auditor's evaluation of the nearly \$600 million that was sent directly to public schools to help low-performing students. The statewide impacts of the spending were unknown due to accountability and transparency issues. And that's only one of the multiple streams of spending coming out of the education budget.

According to our latest report on COVID learning loss, fewer than half of Minnesota students are proficient in math (44.6 percent), and just under 50 percent of students can't read at grade level. Continuing to pour more money into a broken system and hoping for different results is bad policy. A broken, top-down system won't suddenly become student-centered no matter the dollar amount funneled into it.

Ethnic studies is the next manifestation of CRT in schools.

The push to add ethnic studies as a fifth strand of social studies, mandate it across all K-12 academic subject areas — even in private and home schools — and make it a course requirement for high school graduation is expected to be an education priority for Democrats this upcoming session. But ethnic studies is not an innocent study of cultures, their histories, and artistic, literary, economic and social achievements; it is a highly politicized course founded

on themes of systems of power and oppression, white supremacy, patriarchy, colonialism, and implicit bias, to name a few. It goes beyond the standard “anti-racist” Critical Race Theory (CRT) focus, importing the whole ideological thought world from which CRT sprang, and serves as a vector for the activist network that is driving it nationally.

Continuing to pour more money into a broken system and hoping for different results is bad policy.

A broken, top-down system won't suddenly become student-centered no matter the dollar amount funneled into it.

The goal with ethnic studies is not to improve academic standards in core subject areas in our state's K-12 public schools. On the contrary, Minnesota's public education system is deemed a “white supremacist puzzle that must be taken apart and exposed for the lie it is,” according to Jonathan Hamilton of Education for Liberation Minnesota and a member of the Minnesota Department of Education's social studies standards revision committee. Ethnic studies is the weapon of choice in taking our schools apart.

The marching orders to solidify ethnic studies throughout Minnesota K-12 education can be traced back to California, where a national movement to enlist our children as foot soldiers in an extremist political crusade first began. Ethnic studies activists here in the state have taken a step-by-step approach, from pressuring the Minneapolis and St. Paul school districts to adopt ethnic studies first as a high school elective and then as a graduation requirement to stacking the social studies standards committee.

This version of ethnic studies is not

about teaching students to come together and appreciate and understand our differences. It is a political manifesto that will reshape our children's identity and worldviews, and its saturation into K-12 education must be stopped.

Spending the surplus

According to Minnesota Management and Budget (MMB), the Minnesota legislature will have a \$17.6 billion surplus to work with during this legislative session. Most of that money is already in the bank but \$6 billion is expected to be part of the new base of revenue available for future budgets. Walz and the legislature should resist the urge to make new spending commitments on programs that will add to base spending. Revenue may be high today, but as soon as the COVID hangover is finished, the state could find itself in deficit once again. With the rainy-day fund already full, Minnesota should permanently cut tax rates before agreeing to new ongoing spending on things like paid family leave or childcare.

More funding can make the childcare system worse.

In his Budget to Move Minnesota Forward, announced early this year when the state surplus was pegged at \$9.3 billion, Walz proposed spending three quarters of a billion dollars to expand funding on early learning scholarships and provide public Pre-K for underserved 4-year-olds. For Walz, the state's “multibillion-dollar budget surplus presents a rare opportunity to expand childcare availability and increase affordability,” reports the *Star Tribune*. In fact, Walz has already pledged that among other spending areas, childcare will be a “fundamental priority” in the upcoming legislative session.

Certainly, Minnesota has a childcare crisis, and the lack of affordable childcare in the state is detrimental to both parents and the economy. But this crisis exists because of government overregulation, not a lack of state funding.

Compared to other states, day care centers in Minnesota follow more stringent rules, which raise the cost of providing care leading to high tuition.

For example, to be a teacher at a licensed day care center, someone with a bachelor's degree must have over one thousand hours of work experience as an assistant teacher. But in other states, teachers are merely required to be over 18 years old and take some training before looking after children.

Minnesota also requires that someone with a high school diploma must have over 2000 hours of experience as an aide as well as college credits before they can be an assistant teacher. But even with such qualifications, assistant teachers can only look after children under the supervision of a teacher. Combined with the state's low child-staff ratios and strict group size limits — especially for younger kids — providers have no wiggle room to keep costs down while being fully staffed.

Spending money on childcare is unlikely to address the root cause of this crisis. At best, such spending will increase demand while doing nothing to increase supply. This will raise prices further, consequently hurting low- and middle-income parents who are unable to access these subsidies. This is bad enough on its own, but evidence from other countries and states show that free Pre-K programs do more to raise prices and actually worsen care. In Tennessee and Quebec, for example, while free Pre-K improved access to childcare, it also worsened health, social, cognitive, and educational outcomes among children involved in such programs.

Walz and the legislature should be more wary about putting taxpayers on the hook for spending that will not only fail to address the problem, it might even do more harm than good.

The false promise of paid family and medical leave.

One of the likely recipients of a chunk of Minnesota's forecast budget surplus is a scheme for paid family and medical leave.

The Minnesota Chamber of Commerce says 80 percent of its member companies already provide paid family leave. So, one might ask, "What's the point?" A 2019 analysis by nonpartisan House researchers found that just under 200,000 Minnesota workers would take

up benefits in the program annually — less than seven percent of the state's workforce.

So why does the government need to get involved? Because, as KSTP reported on December 9, "Democrats say the fact that so many companies already offer paid family leave is one reason to expand it to many small businesses that don't."

The purpose is to impose on small businesses those practices that big businesses have adopted willingly. But it isn't obvious why we should use the law to make small businesses run like big ones. The National Federation of Independent Business (NFIB), an association of small businesses in the United States, publicly opposed the mandates, stating, "The vast majority of small business owners provide flexibility for employees to pick up kids from school, attend tee ball games, and attend to family emergencies. A one-size-fits-all

**Current proposals for
paid family and medical
leave construct
a very expensive,
over-engineered
hammer to crack a
relatively small nut.**

government mandate is both financially and administratively burdensome."

There are also practical concerns. When paid family and medical leave was proposed back in 2020, it included a new 0.6 percent payroll tax which, according to Bill Marx, the former House chief fiscal analyst, would be split between the employee and employer's income. This revenue would be used to pay for a maximum length of 12 weeks per year for medical or pregnancy leave and up to another 12 weeks for other qualifying exigencies for those who qualify.

As with a similar scheme proposed in 2021, this would fund an entire new state program — similar to the state's

unemployment program but more complicated — with at least 320 full-time workers, a complex new computer system, and at least \$2.1 billion in taxpayer funds over the first four years just to get it started.

This bureaucracy will be needed because the version of the program passed by the House proscribes in detail when employees can take leave and how employers should and should not treat employees who take leave. These stipulations and violations would raise the administrative, bookkeeping, and compliance costs for employers. Furthermore, the opt-out portion of the bill required that private benefit plans mirror the state-mandated program if businesses are to be exempt and that private benefits programs will be overseen by a commissioner, who has the power to terminate such programs if a business violates rules. Such violations could be as minor as businesses failing to provide reports. The exemption rules lock employers into the mandated paid leave program, increasing bureaucracy and government control over private business operations.

If a scheme for paid family and medical leave is proposed in the new year similar to those proposed recently it will construct a very expensive, over-engineered hammer to crack a relatively small nut. The costs, in terms of a higher tax and regulatory burden, especially for a state already struggling economically with such burdens, is not worth the benefit.

Repeatedly, Minnesotans have voiced their dissatisfaction with the direction of the state on issue after issue. Now is the time to hold our leaders — from both parties — accountable to the people. The election die is cast. And now, following years in which Minnesota has been approaching the edge of the cliff pushed by irresponsible public policies, the state is at the brink of plunging into a chasm from which it will be exceedingly difficult to recover. The policies presented here will push Minnesota over the edge. It's vitally important to identify and counter these proposals and work to promote principles and policies we know will walk us back from the edge and make Minnesota a more prosperous, dynamic state. ★



≡ GOVERNMENT

THE 2022 GOLDEN TURKEY AWARD

American Experiment's annual award highlights the state's wasteful spending of taxpayers' money.

By Bill Walsh

The Golden Turkey Award is a light-hearted contest to bring attention to the various budget projects funded by taxpayers that go beyond the usual education, welfare, or transportation spending, and allow Minnesotans to weigh in on the silliest spending of the year. Past winners include Gov. Tim Walz's \$6.9 million unused morgue, an extravagant rest stop on Highway 35 and an expensive bus stop that sits empty.

This year's Golden Turkey was too big to ignore, recognizing waste and fraud that begins at \$250 million and will likely end up closer to a billion dollars when the dust finally settles.

Of course we're talking about the pandemic-related free food program we dubbed Feeding Our Fraud. "It's easy to see how the Feeding Our Future fraud program won this year's Golden Turkey with the sheer size of the fraud, with at least \$250 million stolen from the taxpayers," says John Hinderaker, president of Center of the American Experiment. "While most nominees for this award are merely silly or wasteful, this program was actually criminal."

Indictments related to the program have identified \$250 million in fraud, a number to grow as the FBI and U.S. Attorney continue their investigation. One thing that won't need investigating (or a recount) is the final vote tally for this year's award, with Feeding Our Fraud winning almost 80 percent of the online vote. Almost 3,000 Minnesotans participated in this year's contest.

The Winner Feeding Our Fraud

As the pandemic caused uncertainty throughout the nation, politicians in Washington, D.C. reverted to doing what they do best: spending taxpayers' money. They passed the Families First Coronavirus Response Act in March 2020, sending billions to the states to feed presumed hungry children who found themselves locked out of America's schools. The plan was to use the current federal Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) to distribute meals through feeding sites across the state.

Most of the sites were schools and childcare centers already enrolled in the program. But due to COVID-19, more sites were needed to distribute meals to needy children. The Minnesota Department of Education was the agency in charge of distributing the money to schools and non-profits who would in turn fund meal distribution sites.

All the pieces were put in place for bad actors to swoop in and take advantage of the generosity of American taxpayers to help those in need:

- Big money from Washington to Minnesota to respond to a crisis.
- Bureaucrats at the Minnesota Department of Education blindly approving contracts from their work-from-home bunkers.
- Non-profits springing up overnight to act as intermediaries between the state agency and food distribution sites.

"While most nominees for this award are merely silly or wasteful, this program was actually criminal."

—John Hinderaker,
president of Center of
the American Experiment.

Everyone knows what happened next.

Fraudsters at non-profits like Feeding Our Future and Partners In Nutrition used computer programs to generate fake children's names and enroll them in the free meal program. Sites were allegedly run out of small offices claiming to feed thousands of meals a day. Bureaucrats at MDE ignored their duty to oversee the program and failed to make routine site visits that would have exposed the fraud immediately. Millions of dollars were stolen before the FBI finally stepped in and shut it down in January 2022.

But not before the fraudsters bought luxury cars, boats, houses, and overseas trips. Even worse, much of the stolen money left the county

and will never be recovered.

The Minnesota Department of Education wins this year's Golden Turkey award for their lax oversight of the Summer Food Service Program. They allowed hundreds of millions of dollars to be stolen, making *us* the turkeys.



The other nominees for the 2022 Golden Turkey Award include:

Runner Up

\$1.3 million to pay kids to go outside

How bad has it gotten in Minnesota when we need a state program to pay kids to go outside and play? That's the purpose behind the Department of Natural Resources' No Child Left Inside program, which awarded \$1.3 million to 153 organizations in 2022. Nominations are currently open for another round of grants in 2023.

This program is another sad example of Minnesotans ceding responsibility to government. Playing outside used to be handled by families. In fact, most kids used to play outside voluntarily.

The grant program was inspired by Gov. Tim Walz's Children's Cabinet and its Children's Outdoor Bill of Rights which states that "each and every Minnesota child is entitled to experience outdoor recreational activities and discover the natural environment regardless of where they live, learn, or play." One of the 15 enumerated rights is the right to "explore and play outdoors in a safe, welcoming, and culturally affirming place." Is the backyard a culturally affirming place? Asking for a taxpayer friend.

Many of the 153 grants went to school districts for outdoor programming they were probably already providing to students. Ice fishing was a popular activity for grant makers, with \$45,000 going to the Big Fish and Fry High School Ice Fishing League, and \$6,000 going to White Bear Lake schools for their Ice Fishing Club Field Day, where presumably some kids walked to White Bear Lake and went ice fishing, obviously something that could not have happened without state government funding.

Grants were also given for environmental education since children have the right to "protect and preserve our environment for future generations." St. Raphael Catholic School in Springfield received \$2,548 for environmental field trips.

All jokes aside, the next time a governor or legislator tells you we can't cut taxes, schools are underfunded, or people are suffering from a lack of proper health care, show them this article. Clearly, we have money to burn if there is a state grant program to encourage children to play outside. That's why the No Child Left Inside program of the Minnesota DNR was nominated for a Golden Turkey.

Third Place

Self-love, strippers, and dancing in the dark — state arts grants

To protect everyone from the COVID virus, the Minnesota state government shut down all the bars, restaurants, and theaters, putting already starving artists

\$1.3 million RUNNER UP



\$3.1 million THIRD PLACE

out of work. But have no fear: the Creative Support for Individuals grant fund was created to hand out \$6,000 grants to help "Minnesota artists and culture bearers sustain their practice and stay relevant and connected to audiences." You know, the audiences that disappeared when the very same state government shut everything down.

When we say, "handed out grants," we mean it. The Arts Board distributed \$3.1 million to 525 grantees.

Some of the grants went to woke artists happy to take taxpayer money to push their activist agenda. Like Monica Sheets of Minneapolis, who produced issue three of *The GRIND*, a "full-color, printed zine in which current and former erotic dancers present writing and art about the current conditions of and utopian visions for stripping in Minnesota and the Upper Midwest region." Or Atlas O. Phoenix, also of Minneapolis, who gathered footage for his documentary *Beautiful Boi*, a "Black/multiracial, disabled, transmasculine journey to self-love."

Some grants went to people doing things that can only be described as weird. Like Morgan Thorson of Minneapolis, who researched with local dance artists "the gifts of really dark night through outdoor night dancing." Or Gabriel B. Rodreick of Minneapolis, who researched and experimented with a method of dance that

involves "getting dancers out of the wheelchair and onto the floor." Other grants were given to artists like Dave Sandersfeld of North Mankato, who received a grant to purchase recording equipment to allow him to "explore his musical ideas at home and in a cost-effective way."

Zachary S. Ploeger of Pipestone got \$6,000 to "create content to engage with Minnesota audiences in a virtual format." Wait a minute — that's exactly what we do at Golden Turkey! We should have applied for a grant.

Again, these grants are made possible by the Legacy Amendment to the State Constitution, which dedicates a portion of sales taxes to pay for Arts and Cultural Heritage programming. The amendment expires in 2034 and programs like these are a strong reason to let it expire.

As the pandemic caused uncertainty throughout the nation, politicians in Washington, D.C. reverted to doing what they do best: spending taxpayers' money.

The projects we listed are just a few examples of the money given to “artists” during COVID to sustain them through the shutdowns. The full list will make you mad. It made us mad enough to nominate the State Arts Board for a Golden Turkey award for their Creative Support for Individuals Grant Program.

Fourth Place \$19,700 to promote outrageous home remedies for COVID-19

Forget about ventilators, masks, test kits and vaccines. During the height of the pandemic, Walz’s Department of Health spent \$19,700 on the real solution to COVID-19: sauerkraut. A grant awarded to the Lower Phalen Creek Project directed it to produce a video about COVID titled *Traditional Ways of Health and Wellness: How to stay healthy during Covid-19 and beyond*. The grant also funded “wellness bundles” full of herbal teas, dried sage, dried sweetgrass, and immunity supporting lozenges.

The first speaker in the two-hour taxpayer supported video advised Minnesotans to eat homemade sauerkraut to build up the lining of the gut because gut health is tied to immunity. It also promoted fire cider as a “huge immunity booster” that provided “a lot of respiratory support” for COVID patients. According to the grant agreement, the combined reach of the video was supposed to be 5,000 Minnesotans. The video currently has 17 views on YouTube, one of them from the Golden Turkey Committee.

The grant also funded the creation and distribution of 500 wellness bundles with included instructions on how to use the contents to repel COVID. The grant agreement also required the distribution of more conventional COVID information about vaccines, testing, case interviews, and contact tracing.

The Department of Health was nominated for a Golden Turkey for calling out COVID “misinformation” while simultaneously promoting sauerkraut and sage home remedies with taxpayer money.

Southwest Light Rail boondoggle receives Golden Turkey Lifetime Achievement Award

From the beginning, the Southwest Light Rail Transit (SWLRT) budget was eye-popping: \$1.25 billion for 15.8 miles of track connecting Eden Prairie to downtown Minneapolis. The line was supposed to open in 2018. As of this writing, the project cost

During the height of the pandemic, Walz’s Department of Health spent \$19,700 on the real solution to COVID-19: sauerkraut.



has ballooned to at least \$2.74 billion and is set to open in 2027, almost 10 years behind schedule.

It’s a boondoggle project sponsored by government and it deals with transportation, a category that has dominated Golden Turkey nominations and eventual winners. Because this boondoggle has been with us for so long and doesn’t appear to be going away any time soon, the SWLRT project and the Metropolitan Council were granted the first ever Lifetime Achievement Award. In other words, it’s going straight to the Hall of Fame.

Beginning of a boondoggle

As with all transit boondoggles, SWLRT began with a relatively small appropriation from the legislature to “study” routes and possibilities. In 2014, the Minnesota Legislature granted \$37 million to the Met Council to hire staff, open an office, and start planning. Once that happens, the inertia to build is almost unstoppable, with the Rush Line in Ramsey County being one notable exception. “We’ve spent this much, we can’t turn back now” becomes the rallying cry of bureaucrats and urban planners everywhere.

The first big problem for SLWRT was the railroads. Planners wanted to move the freight tracks owned and operated by the railroads. The railroads refused, causing the project to share the corridor with freight trains, setting up a difficult engineering problem between Cedar Lake and Lake of the Isles.

You can’t change the laws of physics

There was not enough room for freight trains and commuter rail, so the geniuses at the Met Council said, “Let’s build a tunnel!” Construction of a half-mile underground tunnel through a very narrow corridor would increase the cost, delay the opening date, and test the laws of physics. It also caused cracks to appear in a nearby condominium tower, surprising no one.

This was the moment in time that planners could have and should have stopped. The original route wouldn’t work. The tunnel was too expensive and risky. The project should have been shelved.

But of course, that didn’t happen and in October 2013 the Met Council switched gears and began promoting their “colocation” plan for SWLRT that required the tunnel.

As the project costs continue to expand and lags painfully behind schedule, the Met Council is *still* \$500 million underfunded, and Chair Charlie Zelle told reporters he would announce “soon” where that money would come from. Zelle’s timeline of “soon” meant after the 2022 election and most suspect he plans to raid other programs and budgets at the Met Council to pay for the SWLRT overages.

With no end in sight and no turning back, the Southwest Light Rail Transit boondoggle of all boondoggles becomes the first ever Golden Turkey Lifetime Achievement Award winner. ★



 PUBLIC POLICY

Hennepin County's **SUCCESS**

The county's effective use of resources for the mentally ill and chemical dependent is a cause for celebration.

BY
DAVID
ZIMMER



The walk-in Behavioral Health Center serves Hennepin County adult residents, focusing on needs related to mental health and substance use disorder.

HENNEPIN COUNTY

00 Chicago Avenue

Behavioral
Health Center

Hennepin
Healthcare



One of the intangible benefits of a period of low crime is how it can parlay into greater public safety results by allowing system practitioners time to identify

and resolve more complex problems. This was the case in the mid-2010s when a period of relative calm allowed public safety, public health, and criminal justice leaders the time to collaborate on solutions to a decades old dilemma of how to better serve the mentally ill and chemically dependent (MI/CD).

Up to that point, millions of dollars had been spent on criminal justice and emergency medical resources on a cohort that in the end wasn't being well-served by either. This poor public policy was arguably leaving people trapped in a cycle of social failure.

This is the story of an initiative in Hennepin County designed to divert MI/CD people from traditional criminal justice system and emergency room dead-ends toward more appropriate pathways that are not only more humane, but are far more efficient and effective in addressing the challenges facing those caught in the system. These initiatives align well with traditional conservative values that ensure resources are used wisely and are designed in a manner that values the opportunity for redemption.

The problem of limited options

Historically, one of the only options for police faced with a MI/CD person committing a low level "crime of survival" (such as trespassing due to homelessness, or petty theft due to indigency, hunger, or chemical

dependency) was to book them in jail. While it was technically correct because the person was committing a crime, it was a poor solution that diverted criminal

"The conservative fosters the fullness of human potential by protecting the freedom and dignity of each person, acknowledging that responsibility comes with freedom. Rights and duties are always linked.

For the conservative, each man and woman is equal in dignity and equal before the law, but gloriously individual and unequal in talents, aptitudes, and outcomes. The conservative celebrates the uniqueness of individuals and does not level to eliminate differences."

—Barbara J. Elliott,
The Conservative Credo

justice system resources away from serious crimes simply to deal with the churn of low-level misdemeanors — and it failed to connect MI/CD defendants to resources that could provide long term solutions to their problems and break a cycle of self-destruction.



Also, as mental health treatment facilities closed or filled, county jails became the de facto mental health care system for far too many people.

Far too often an arrest for a low-level misdemeanor resulted in the person being booked and released with a court date, the person failing to respond to that court date, and a series of bench warrants and re-arrests before the person's case was resolved. Informal court studies showed that a single arrest of an MI/CD person for a low-level misdemeanor would often result in at least two more arrests for — failure to appear — before the case was finally resolved in court. The tragic consequence was after all of this, the MI/CD person was no better equipped with the tools needed to avoid another encounter with law enforcement, and now had a criminal record or a warrant

added to their situation.

The other option for first responders when they encountered this cohort was to bring them to Hennepin County Medical Center's (HCMC) emergency room for medical care. This served only to clog the ER with non-emergency patients and used thousands of dollars in finite Emergency Department resources for unwarranted, non-emergency issues. The ER was not designed as a low-level MI/CD resource center. The only practicable response was to make an evaluation for emergency medical issues and then discharge the patient with no real expectation for appropriate follow-up care.

Both options were poor. They were inefficient, ineffective, and too often left the MI/CD in a downward spiral instead of providing the helping hand they needed. It was an appropriate moment for government to step up and create public policy that broke the destructive cycle.

Opportunity knocked

A combination of pro-active policing and effective punishment beginning in the mid-1990s helped drive Minnesota's crime down for over 20 years. By 2015, crime was manageable and resources were healthy such that law enforcement, criminal justice, and human services and public health leadership began looking at making an impact in areas that had been previously out of reach.

Hennepin County's plan

In 2015 there was growing recognition and concern for the number of mentally ill and chemically dependent inmates in jails. The Minnesota Legislative Auditor and the Major County Sheriff's Association were studying the issue of mental illness in jails. The Hennepin County Sheriff's Office conducted a

one-day snapshot study of inmates in its custody and determined that 52 percent of inmates had a history of mental illness. Also, as mental health treatment facilities closed or filled, county jails became the de facto mental healthcare system for far too many people. Many sheriffs began speaking out about the issue. Sheriff Rich Stanek told the *Star Tribune* in 2016, "What we're seeing is crisis levels of mental illness among our inmates. This is solid evidence that our jails continue to serve as the largest mental health facilities in the state."

In response to these concerns, the Hennepin County Board committed itself to reducing the number of people with mental illness in the jails. It was part of the Stepping Up Initiative supported by the National Council of Counties. The board's resolution acknowledged the following facts:

- Prevalence rates of serious mental illnesses in jails are three to six times higher than for the general population.
- Almost three-quarters of adults with serious mental illnesses in jails have co-occurring substance use disorders.
- Adults with mental illnesses tend to stay longer in jail and upon release are at a higher risk of recidivism than people without these disorders.
- County jails spend two to three times more on adults with mental illnesses that require interventions compared to those without these treatment needs.

Without the appropriate treatment and services, people with mental illnesses continue to cycle through the criminal justice system, often resulting in tragic outcomes for these individuals and their families.



David Zimmer is Center of the American Experiment's policy fellow for criminal justice and public safety. Zimmer served 33 years in local law enforcement with the Hennepin County Sheriff's Office, retiring as a Captain. During his law enforcement career, he served as a deputy and a supervisor in areas including the Jail, Courts, Patrol/Water Patrol, Investigations, and Tactical Command.

Hennepin County's response

As a result of this focused concern, Hennepin County's Criminal Justice Coordinating Committee formed a Behavioral Health Sub-Committee (BHSC) and tasked this sub-committee with researching and proposing solutions to problems involving MI/CD people who enter the justice system. The BHSC was made up of representatives from public health and human services, the county and city attorney's offices, the public defender, district court, and law enforcement, and began meeting regularly.

I was the sheriff's office representative on this sub-committee, and together with my new colleagues, set about to collaborate on ways to improve outcomes for MI/CD individuals. This not only represented fiscal responsibility, but also represented a pathway to help improve their lives by connecting them with sustained resources and programs designed for their situations and also to avoid jail.

The BHSC began with a thorough review of existing processes our agencies used when encountering the MI/CD population to identify areas for improved outcomes. We also conducted reviews of several other jurisdictions to see how they were dealing with this cohort.

We visited jails, courts, and medical facilities in Chicago, Orlando, Houston, Los Angeles, and New York City to meet with our counterparts and learn from their efforts at early identification of MI/CD and about diverting that cohort away from the criminal justice system and emergency rooms where appropriate.



This center serves as a jail diversion option for officers dealing with MI/CD individuals who don't pose a public safety threat and are not in need of hospital-level care.

Based on what we learned, our group committed to the concept of developing a coordinated response around the Sequential Intercept Model (SIM) as developed by the Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), an agency within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

SIM identifies all the potential contact points a person has in the criminal justice system and offers opportunities

to "intercept" or divert that person from the standard process. It provides alternative resources to the situation to offer a better outcome for the MI/CD and is shown in the chart below.

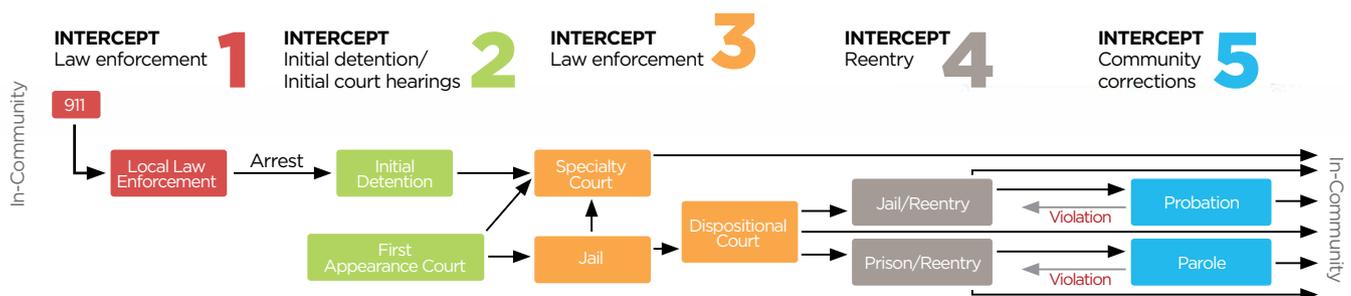
Intercept One — jail diversion

The first and arguably most impactful intercept point is the initial call and response by law enforcement. It became immediately clear to us that our priority for officers should be to develop alternatives to jail for MI/CD individuals who commit "crimes of survival." This also included alternatives to hospital emergency rooms.

To address possible Intercept One opportunities, the BHSC decided on the concept of a walk-in/drop-off behavioral health center where the MI/CD cohort could either self-report or be dropped off by first responders or others. It represented an appropriate intercept and offered first responders a resource other than jail or the ER for these low-level offenders. Officers maintained discretion on whether to submit a case to the prosecutor's office for charging consideration, however that was not the goal of the intercept.

In 2018 Hennepin County Human Services and Public Health developed a plan to re-envision and retrofit the old county detox center at 1800 Chicago Ave. S. in Minneapolis based on the walk-in/drop-off model that included the creation of a comprehensive Behavioral Health Center (BHC). This center operates as triage and assessment clinic that connects those dropped off with sustained resources to help them with their MI/CD issues. This center serves

SAMHSA's Sequential Intercept Model



as a jail diversion option for officers dealing with MI/CD individuals who don't pose a public safety threat and are not in need of hospital-level care. The BHC also has a 16-bed unit dedicated to crisis stabilization and a 60-bed unit for substance abuse withdrawal.

The renovation costs to open the center totaled just over \$7 million — much of it covered by a state grant. The

Each of these intercepts repurposed existing resources to target them more specifically to the MI/CD frequenting jails and emergency rooms.

force. It also incorporates social workers into police departments to assist officers and to follow-up with individuals who would benefit from other resources.

Intercepts 2-5

These intercepts have been addressed largely through the Hennepin County Jail's Mental Health Initiative and the efforts of the Hennepin County Treatment Courts, Human Services and Public Health, and Community Corrections.

The Hennepin County Sheriff's Office implemented several changes in how it staffed and managed the MI/CD people in custody. These efforts were monitored and refined continuously during a purpose-driven weekly staff meeting I chaired as the Jail Commander. Members of the team included the jail nursing manager, the

who were booked, routing them to jail medical for evaluation, and classifying them to ensure they were managed properly during their detention.

An important part of the system was the addition of a "release nurse" who reviewed the pending releases and ensured they had future appointments, prescriptions, and active medical issues in check before being released. Prior to the release nurse position, inmates were too often released without being given information on future social services appointments or their medications and prescriptions. The situation for these people frequently deteriorated because of this disconnect, and the cycle of re-arrest or admission into the emergency room repeated.

One of the most successful aspects of the jail initiative was the collaboration with Human Services and Public Health

annual operating budget has been set at \$1 million in 2022 and \$1.8 million in 2023.

As of April 2022, the walk-in/drop-off center is open 9 am to 9 pm, Monday through Friday, with the goal of becoming a 24-hour, 7 days per week resource once staffing and funding are secured.

In 2020, the clients served by the center averaged about 175 per month. As of September 2022, the average has risen to over 600 per month — a testament to both the need for and the utility of the center.

Other Intercept One initiatives include Crisis Intervention Training for officers, deputies, and dispatchers. This training helps dispatchers identify possible MI/CD issues and determine the best responses. For law enforcement, it provides tools to recognize MI/CD behaviors and to utilize responses that improve compliance, reducing the need to use

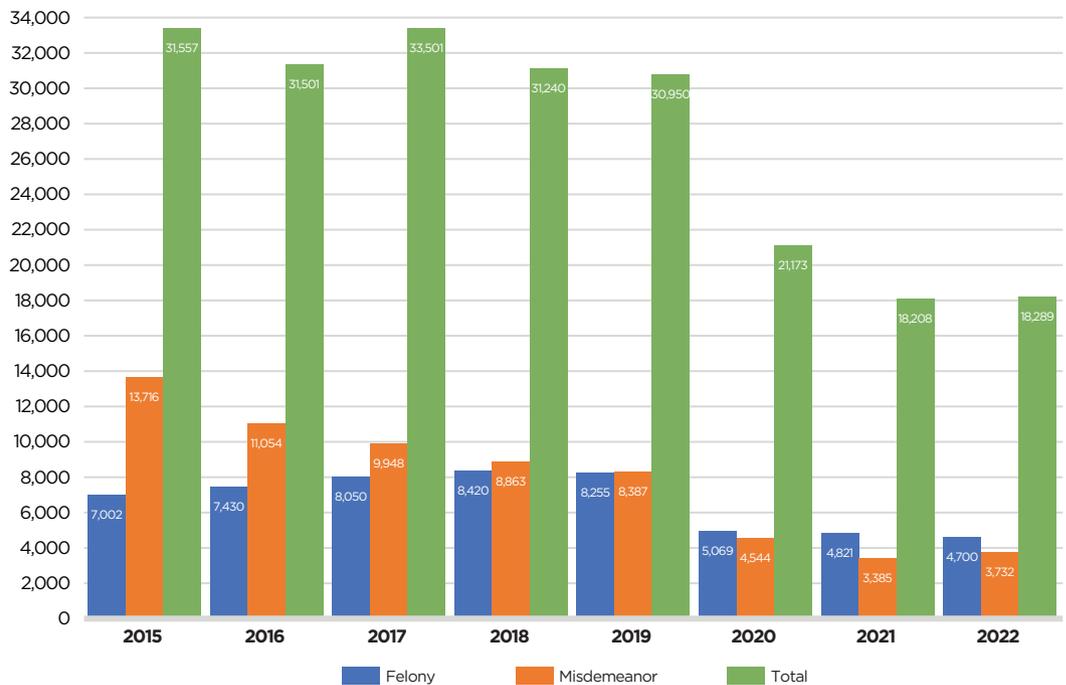
mental health nurse, the release nurse, a human services manager, and deputies assigned to various posts such as mental health units, release, and classification.

This group worked diligently to create a system that focused on early identification of the MI/CD individuals

(HSPHD) to embed social workers in the jail. This team was named the Integrated Access Team (IAT). The IAT reviewed each booking to determine if the arrested party was a current or former client of a county social worker. If so, they would re-connect

2015-2022 YTD through October

Felonies, Misdemeanors, and Total Bookings



and ensure resources and programming didn't become derailed due to the arrest. If the person wasn't connected to social services, the IAT met with the individual, evaluated his needs, and set up a plan for access to resources to ensure future success.

The team of deputies, IAT, and jail medical made certain that court party notifications were made when a current or former mental health court client was booked into jail. This allowed for prompt review of the situation by the parties and the judge, and ensured quicker decisions on continued detention, appropriate charges or diversion, requests for competency evaluations, or even the transfer to HMC or another regional mental health facility. This coordinated communication helped facilitate court interception of MI/CD criminal cases and avoided repeated releases and re-bookings for the same offence.

All of this was done without diverting funding away from law enforcement. Each of these intercepts repurposed existing resources to target them more specifically to the MI/CD frequenting jails and emergency rooms.

Results

The initiatives implemented since 2015 have shown great success. While COVID and the civil unrest after the death of George Floyd disrupted and delayed some of this work, the results have nonetheless been impressive.

Data compiled by the jail's IAT indicates the team of social workers embedded in the jail and connecting with the MI/CD cohort is having a significant impact in reducing future arrests and use of emergency room resources. In 2017 for example, those inmates who connected with the IAT experienced an impressive 92.5 percent reduction in jail bookings and a 24 percent reduction in emergency room admissions in the 12 months following their acceptance of IAT resources.

The Behavioral Health Center's walk-in/drop-off center conducted an analysis of the clients using the center between January 1, 2020, and June 30, 2021, comparing the six months before using

the resource with the six months after. The clientele experienced a 14 percent reduction in both jail bookings and emergency room visits.

Given the thousands of individuals that are now serviced through the IAT and BHC annually, the financial savings achieved through reductions in the number of jail bookings and use of emergency room resources is



Hennepin County has devoted a considerable amount of effort and repurposed many resources to deal more effectively with the issues confronting the MI/CD population.

conservatively several million dollars per year. Hennepin County plans to conduct a robust Return on Investment (ROI) study in the coming years. The human successes are arguably more impactful and important than the financial savings. Helping the MI/CD population by breaking the cycle of unnecessary arrests and prosecutions not only benefits them, but greatly benefits the criminal justice system by reducing caseloads and allowing the system to focus resources on serious crimes.

The adjacent chart illustrates the change in the proportion of low-level misdemeanors to serious felony bookings since 2015 in the Hennepin County Jail. While COVID and civil unrest since 2020 have certainly played a part, intercepting low-level offenses involving MI/CD people have flipped

the ratio to where felony bookings now outpace misdemeanor bookings. This contrasts sharply to 2015 when misdemeanors outnumbered felonies 2-to-1.

Conclusion

In 2015 during a period of relative calm, Hennepin County leadership recognized and began addressing a long-standing problem: system practitioners using the jail and emergency rooms to deal with mentally ill and chemically dependent behavior. Hennepin County has devoted a considerable amount of effort and repurposed many resources to deal more effectively with the issues confronting the MI/CD population.

The efforts are paying off financially for the taxpayers who ultimately fund the efforts, and more importantly for the MI/CD individuals who are directly impacted, as well as others in the community. In the Hennepin County Criminal Justice Behavioral Health Initiative's five-year report from October 2020, Mary Ellen Heng, Deputy Minneapolis City Attorney recalled this success story:

"A woman I have prosecuted for many years for DWI and prostitution has addiction issues that drive her behavior. She has been in and out of treatment and jail. She started using again and was convicted of gross misdemeanor trespassing.

When she successfully completed Restorative Court, she was nine months sober, had her own place to live and had no new offenses since engaging with the social workers. By all accounts she is a success story, and she is staying on this good path."

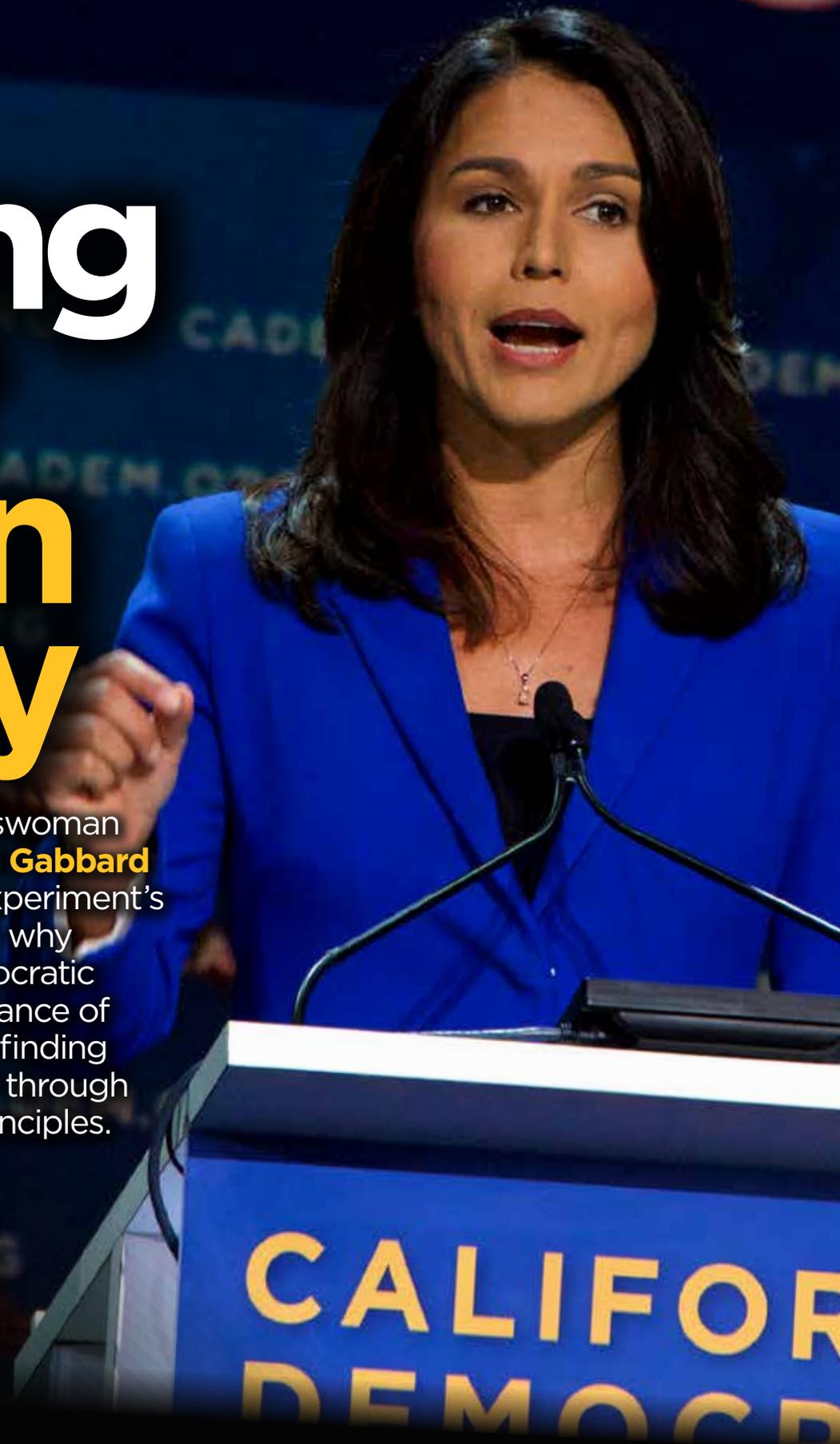
An era of low crime provided an opening to find ways to alleviate the chronic dual problems of failing those with mental health and chemical dependency issues and diverting limited emergency and law enforcement resources from serious crimes. Hennepin County found success in these new strategies creating more humane, efficient, and effective solutions, and we all reap the benefits. ★

≡ Q&A

Going Her Own Way

Former Congresswoman from Hawaii **Tulsi Gabbard** tells American Experiment's **John Hinderaker** why she left the Democratic Party, the importance of free speech, and finding common ground through Constitutional principles.

Then presidential candidate Tulsi Gabbard speaking at the 2019 California Democratic Convention in San Francisco, CA.



Tulsi Gabbard served as congresswoman from 2013 to 2021 representing Hawaii's 2nd congressional district. She was a candidate for the presidential nomination in 2020 and is currently a Lieutenant Colonel in the U.S. Army Reserves with multiple deployments in the Middle East. Gabbard was the keynote speaker at this year's Fall Briefing for Center of the American Experiment.

John Hinderaker: Tulsi Gabbard, you made news when you announced that you were leaving the Democratic Party. What led you to make that decision?

Tulsi Gabbard: It really came down to the reality that today's Democratic Party is controlled by this elitist cabal of war mongers who don't stand for freedom. They hate freedom and are seeking at every opportunity to try to undermine our God-given rights and freedoms enshrined in the Constitution and Bill of Rights. They're doing so by politicizing and weaponizing public institutions like the FBI and the Department of Homeland Security — you could go down a laundry list of these institutions — that we've seen, unfortunately, being used against their political opponents, seeking to silence those of us who have dissenting voices or who dare to even just question and challenge their narrative. Undermining our Constitution is doing great harm to this country and the freedoms that we cherish and hold dear.

For those of us who came of age in the Vietnam era, the idea of Democrats as war mongers is hard to wrap our

heads around. How did that happen and when?

I can't say exactly when this happened, but it's unfortunately something that we've seen increasing over time where in this culture of fear, censorship, and cancellation, traditional voices of peace in the Democratic Party have been silenced. We saw this most recently around the issue of the ongoing war in Ukraine. Several months after Russia wrongly invaded Ukraine, only then did so-called progressive voices in Congress speak up and wrote a letter calling on the president to exercise diplomacy to try to bring about an end to this war. And they did so very gently. But even then, that request was rescinded just the day after they sent the letter. And their position was almost exactly the opposite of what had been written, saying, "Well, no, actually there

"The best way for us to protect and defend our right to free speech is to exercise it."

should be no diplomacy."

The reason why this is relevant is because the Biden administration, going all the way back to March, barely a month after Putin invaded Ukraine, actually stopped negotiations that were going on between Ukrainian officials and Russian officials, at the time trying to figure out some kind of negotiated end to this war. It was the Biden administration and others who said, "Don't negotiate."

We famously saw how it was both Republican and Democrat leaders in the U.S. Senate and the House of Representatives criticizing people like Senator Rand Paul, who very simply said, "Hey, if you're going to send tens of billions of American taxpayer dollars to Ukraine, we should have a special inspector general appointed to account

for how those dollars are spent, just like we did with Afghanistan." Because what we saw in Afghanistan was that this money was squandered — much of it was squandered and wasted and gone unaccounted for. Rand Paul was called names like "traitor" a "Putin propagandist." The fact that there is no room in Washington for Democrats or Republicans to be a voice for peace or even at a minimum, a voice for accountability — a questioning voice — should be of concern to all Americans.



You have a strong military background, you continue to serve in the army, and have been pro-military and pro-American as a politician. What do you see as the main international threats to U.S. interests?

Well, the greatest existential threat we face is the threat of potential nuclear war. There's no question about it. Leaders in both parties fail to speak the truth to the American people about the consequences of their policies. They fail to address the reality that it is their policies that have driven us to the brink of nuclear war and have also failed the American people in making sure that we have someplace safe to go. And this is the travesty of the situation that we're facing is that the most powerful leaders in this country, in the event of a nuclear attack or nuclear war, will have a safe place to go. And yet, even as they push us toward nuclear war, they have failed to provide the same to the American people.

This is an urgent threat that with a simple spark could turn this existing conflict into one where we are facing World War III and nuclear war. We need both Democrats and Republicans in Congress to force this shift and change in our country's foreign policy in order to walk us back from the brink.

You have been an outspoken defender of free speech. Why do you think freedom of speech has come under attack in recent years and what can we do to preserve our first amendment rights?

It's unfortunate that it seems like so many people are taking our freedom of speech for granted, and perhaps not realizing how dangerous it is to put the power of limiting free speech into the hands of government. Political winds shift very quickly. Just because they may agree with the people in power in government today and want to silence those who they deem as saying things that are offensive, unsavory, or even hateful, well, tomorrow the tables might be turned and they may be the ones who are silenced.

One of the best ways for us to protect and defend our right to free speech is to exercise it. The way to defeat speech that you don't like is not to ban it or silence it, it is to defeat that speech with more speech — with superior arguments. The best way to do that is to raise your own voice and to gather others of like mind to raise their voices to defeat that speech that you find to be offensive.

What about the censorship that we have seen coming from the social media platforms and the major tech companies? Do you see that as a problem? And if so, what can we do about it?

One of the problems here is with Section 230, which has given these Big Tech and social media companies legal immunity from the kinds of lawsuits that publishers like *The New York Times*, for example, are subject to, and which is why they are selective and curate what they choose to print, as all publishers and media sources are. So these Big Tech and social media companies have the legal protection based on the assumption that they are not curating content, and that



Gabbard answers audience questions with CAE's president John Hinderaker at the Center's Fall Briefing in Waconia on October 15.

they are a true, free, open marketplace of ideas even as they are privately owned corporations. The problem is that even though they may *say* that's what they are, in reality they are curating content exactly as publishers do. They will ban someone, suspend accounts, or they will shadow ban someone. I've gone through this myself with Instagram where they will not ban you or delete your account, but they will suppress who is actually able to see it because they don't like the content that you're putting out.

This is a dangerous thing, and they are abusing the very protection of the law that they have; it's a big problem that needs to be addressed. If we have these public platforms that are actual public platforms where they're no different than if you or I went and stood on a street corner in the middle of town and had dueling perspectives on issues and we talked about them — if that's really what these platforms are — then they need to be that rather than doing what they're doing, which is essentially manipulating their viewers and readers into only seeing the information that these social media giants want them to see.

These days, Tulsi, it seems that you are mostly popular on the right. Are there still issues where you consider

yourself to be a liberal?

I don't like labels in general. And I challenge the use of the word liberal because I think those who use the term today are out of touch with the traditional definition of liberalism. And I've had this conversation with people who call themselves conservatives, and we compare the traditional liberal principles of the JFK era of politics with today's conservative principles, and in many ways they're quite similar. So, I have a problem with these labels because they have become so subjective and interpreted in very, very different ways.

It's crazy to me that if you're a voice of truth and a voice speaking out about the importance of the Constitution, that is automatically assumed to be a voice on the Right, or a conservative voice, or a Republican voice. My hope is that in our political discourse and for voters across the country, we can get out of the Left-Right, Democrat-Republican mindset and instead look at different candidates running for office and be able to discuss and talk about issues based on that common ground of the Constitution, of a true appreciation for our freedoms enshrined in it and Bill of Rights.

If we can stand on that common ground, then we have the opportunity and ability to really have a conversation about how we tackle the challenges



that are facing the American people today. My hope is that we would start to see more people who call themselves Democrats *and* Republicans who find themselves grounded in that foundation of our country.

You and I are talking, Tulsi, just a few days after the midterm elections in November — and they’re still counting ballots in some states. But what did you make of the results?

I’m not a political pundit, so I’m not going to pretend to have an explanation

“My fear is that we have people in power who are already, just days after the close of the 2022 election, looking to 2024 and are setting their agendas based on what they think will get them more power in 2024”

for why and how voters voted the way they did. No party had a runaway election night. This highlights the responsibility of elected leaders in both parties to put the interests of the American people ahead of the partisan interests of their political party. There are many challenges we’re facing as a country having a deep impact on everyday Americans: everything from the inability to feel safe in so many communities in this country — not only

the big cities, but also in some rural communities as well — to people’s increasing concern about the fact that we are facing an unprecedented number of people illegally crossing our southern border. Obviously too, the impact that rising inflation has had on our economy and how people are really struggling just to make ends meet.

My point is that I’ll let the pundits and the statisticians assess what happened on election day. I think it’s important for us to look at how we move forward as a country to actually hold leaders accountable to do their jobs, whether they’re a Republican or a Democrat. They’re going to have to work together and find common ground if they are serious about fulfilling their responsibility. My fear is that we have people in power who are already, just days after the close of the 2022 election, looking to 2024 and are setting their agendas based on what they think will get them more power in 2024, both in Congress and the White House. And the ones who will lose for certain in that case are the American people.

What do you see as your future in public life? Do you expect to run for office again? Do you think you’ll remain an Independent, possibly become a Republican? What does the future hold for you?

I’m honestly not thinking about any of those things right now. I left the Democratic Party, I’m an Independent and seeking to do all that I can to best serve God and this country. I will continue to use whatever platforms I have available to be a voice for truth and a voice of reason, both of which are unfortunately very uncommon and

rare in our politics right now. We need more of that. We need more people to stop self-censoring. We need more people to exercise their free speech. We need more dialogue and conversation in this country. And my hope is that I can, in my own small way, have a positive impact by encouraging others to do the same.

When you were here for our Fall Briefing in October, you had just started a podcast. How often have you been podcasting and where can our readers go to keep up with that?

Yes. I came and visited you in Minnesota at an eventful time. It was the first major event that I participated in after I announced that I was leaving the Democratic Party in the debut episode of my online show and podcast, *The Tulsi Gabbard Show*. We have published, I think, five episodes since then, examining some of the major reasons why I left the Democratic Party and going in-depth on those issues. We will be releasing an episode on the First Amendment and also talking with the former head of the ACLU who actually held the line for free speech during his tenure. I had a great conversation with Steve Scalise about the Second Amendment. We have a number of great guests and great conversations out. You can find the podcast anywhere you listen to podcasts: on Apple, Spotify, or others. And you can also watch it on YouTube and Rumble. Subscribe and share and support our efforts on Locals.com or Substack. These are important conversations about the crucial issues of our time. ★



The
THINKING
MINNESOTA
POLL

THE EMPATHY VOTE

Gauging the attitudes that
drive Minnesota voters.

From soccer moms to NASCAR dads, from gray voters to Millennials — political experts have spent decades identifying certain voters by their demographic characteristics. Based on the results of the latest *Thinking Minnesota* Poll, it might be more useful to begin identifying people less by who they are and more by how they feel.

Soccer moms, for example, are typically thought of as highly educated women aged 18-54, mostly living in the suburbs. As we tracked that demographic throughout the questions in the poll, their answers revealed a common feeling: empathy. Repeatedly, these respondents chose solutions that went against their own best interests, with empathy for others the common denominator in their answers to questions on public safety, education, race, taxes, and energy policy.

Let's call them political empaths.

Instead of worrying about their own safety, they feel empathy for minorities they see as being unfairly targeted in a prejudicial justice system. Instead of worrying about higher taxes for themselves (most of our political empaths have college degrees), they feel empathy for those who might need paid family leave. Again, instead of worrying about their own family budget, they push for more funding for K-12 schools, empathizing with teachers who they believe work hard for little pay.

The fact that these empaths are believing myths promoted by political messaging (like teachers not being paid enough) is irrelevant for those in the business of trying to figure out how to make a sale, win an argument, or get elected to office. Feelings rule the day.

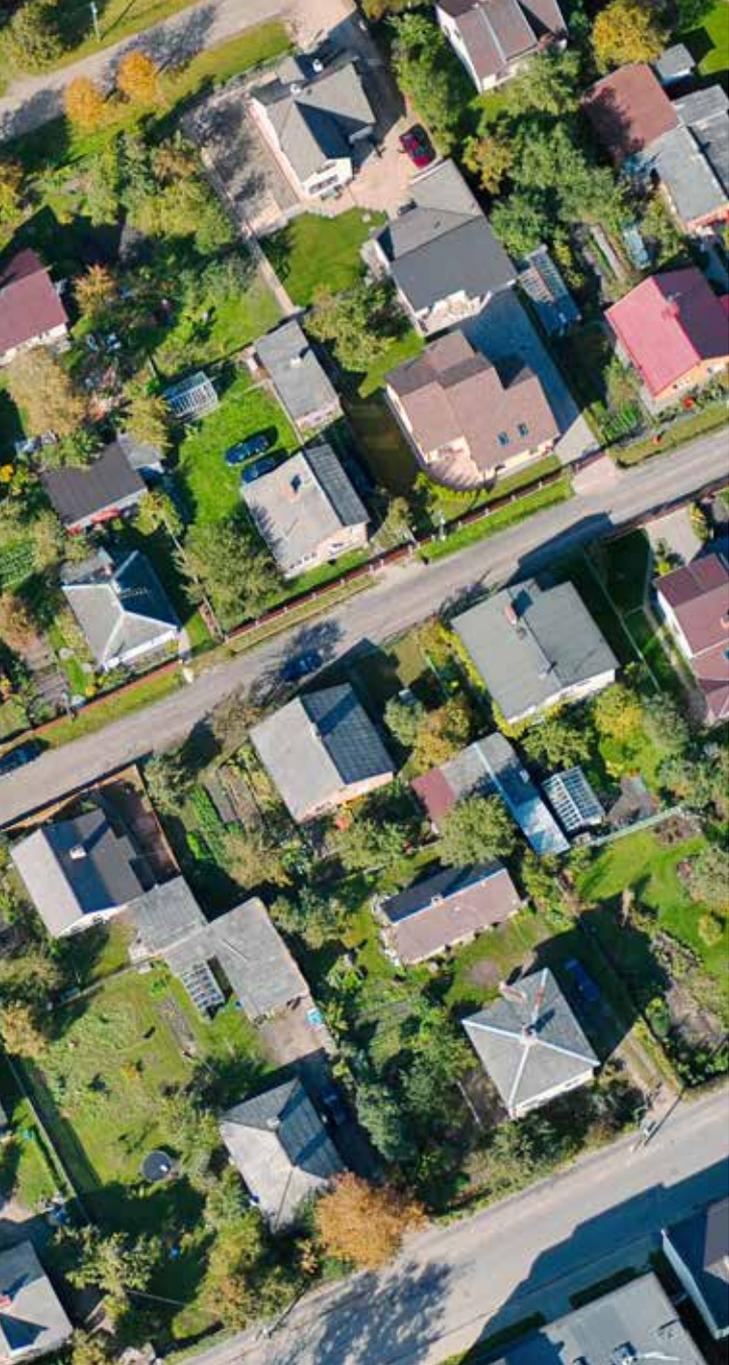
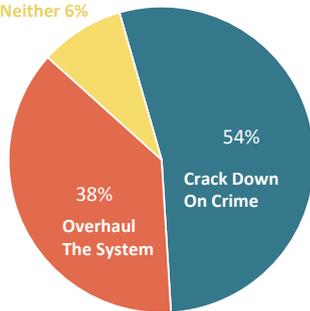


FIGURE 1: Most Minnesotans want to crack down on crime versus overhaul the system, including a majority of those in the suburbs.

“Thinking about crime, which statement comes closest to your opinion: Some people say crime rates are surging and now is not the time to gut law enforcement. Instead, we must do what’s necessary to crack down on crime, toughen penalties for violent offenders, and ensure the safety of our communities. Other people say our criminal justice system is ridden with prejudice that unfairly targets minorities and low-income communities. They say we must take necessary steps to overhaul our criminal justice system, promote fairness, and lower incarceration rates for nonviolent offenders.”

Don't Know/
Neither 6%



	Crack Down	Overhaul	Net Crack Down
Republicans	89%	7%	+82
Independents	47%	27%	+20
Democrats	25%	69%	-44
Men Ages 18-54	55%	37%	+18
Men Ages 55+	70%	23%	+47
Women Ages 18-54	41%	49%	-8
Women Ages 55+	53%	40%	+13
Twin Cities	41%	53%	-12
MSP Suburbs	55%	35%	+20
Rest Of State	62%	28%	+34

FIGURE 2: When it comes to education, most Minnesotans prioritize funding over accountability.

“Thinking about education, which statement comes closest to your opinion: Some people say we need to demand more accountability from K-12 schools such as higher test scores and graduation rates before we increase their funding. Other people say we need to increase education funding to keep up with inflation and ensure equal opportunities for all students.”

Don't Know/
Neither 6%



	Accountability	Funding	Net Accountability
Republicans	65%	27%	+38
Independents	46%	41%	+5
Democrats	12%	86%	-74
Men Ages 18-54	40%	54%	-14
Men Ages 55+	50%	42%	+18
Women Ages 18-54	24%	68%	-44
Women Ages 55+	41%	55%	-14
Twin Cities	30%	68%	-38
MSP Suburbs	43%	49%	-6
Rest Of State	41%	51%	-10

The *Thinking Minnesota* Poll was conducted by Meeting Street Insights, a nationally recognized polling operation based in Charleston, South Carolina. Using a mix of cell phones and landline phones, the company interviewed 500 registered voters across Minnesota from November 28-30, 2022. The margin of error is ± 4.38 percent.

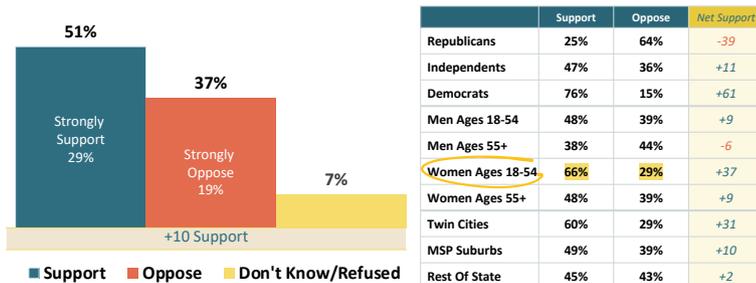
It starts with public safety. Given the choice between cracking down on crime and overhauling our criminal justice system, Minnesotans favored getting tough on crime

About the pollster

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

FIGURE 3: A slight majority of Minnesotans support a mandatory Ethnic Studies Program, including a plurality of Independents.

“And, do you SUPPORT or OPPOSE guaranteeing access to Ethnic Studies instruction for all K-12 students, including the creation of an Ethnic Studies high school graduation requirement?”



	Support	Oppose	Net Support
Republicans	25%	64%	-39
Independents	47%	36%	+11
Democrats	76%	15%	+61
Men Ages 18-54	48%	39%	+9
Men Ages 55+	38%	44%	-6
Women Ages 18-54	66%	29%	+37
Women Ages 55+	48%	39%	+9
Twin Cities	60%	29%	+31
MSP Suburbs	49%	39%	+10
Rest Of State	45%	43%	+2

FIGURE 4: Minnesotans are less likely to support Ethnic Studies when told it may prioritize a divisive agenda over teaching about different cultures.

“Regarding ethnic studies, some say that the creation of a mandatory Ethnic Studies Program is LESS about teaching students about different cultures and MORE about a divisive agenda to disrupt and dismantle America’s fundamental institutions. Knowing this, would you be MORE LIKELY or LESS LIKELY to support a mandatory Ethnic Studies Program?”

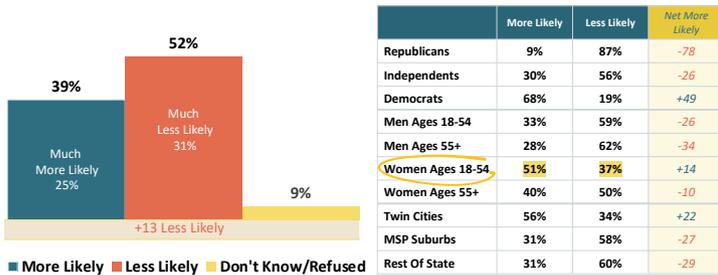


FIGURE 5: On its face, paid family leave is incredibly popular across the state, receiving a majority of support from all subgroups.

“Do you SUPPORT or OPPOSE a new paid family leave program administered by the state that would provide most workers with 12 weeks of partial wage replacement if they need to take time off to have a baby, care for a loved one, or recover from sickness?”

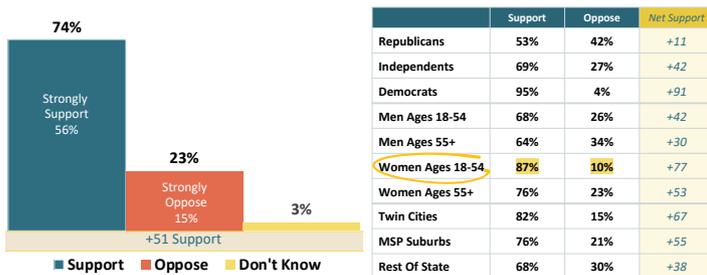
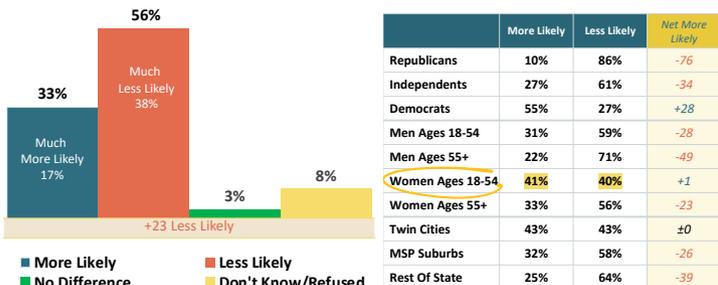


FIGURE 6: A majority of Minnesotans say they are less likely to support paid family leave if it created a new government bureaucracy.

“Would you be MORE LIKELY or LESS LIKELY to support paid family leave if you knew it created a new bureaucracy with hundreds of state government employees?”



Support for the environment has always been a luxury for voters — when things are going well, Minnesotans care about climate change.

54 percent to 38 percent. But our political empaths (women 18-54) bucked that trend and chose overhauling the system 49 percent to 41 percent. That number stands out from every other age group and is 21 points different from women 55 and older. Instead of concern for their own personal safety, they are showing empathy for minorities stuck in a criminal justice system they believe is unfair.

Our political empaths stood out again in a question pitting education funding versus more accountability, with 68 percent choosing increased education funding and only 24 percent demanding more accountability from K-12 schools before we increase their funding. This 44-point spread was by far the largest difference of any demographic subgroup. Part of that is empathy but there is undoubtedly some self-interest with this age group as many women aged 18-54 have children in the school system.

Ultimately, political empaths’ strong support for funding drove the overall result of the education question, with respondents favoring funding over accountability by 18 points, 56 percent to 38 percent. With a \$17.6 billion state budget surplus, it will be hard to stop the momentum of throwing money at the K-12 education system even as the research shows it will do nothing to lift test scores that plummeted during the pandemic.

We asked respondents about injecting ethnic studies into the curriculum for all Minnesota students, including as a graduation requirement. A slight majority of Minnesotans (51 percent) favor the concept of ethnic studies while 37 percent oppose it and 11 percent remain unsure. But when given more information about the real agenda behind this innocuous sounding topic, opinions change to 39 percent/52 percent support/oppose. We characterized ethnic studies as less about teaching students about different cultures and more about a divisive agenda to disrupt and dismantle America’s fundamental institutions. All age and gender subgroups flipped their views once they were given this description, *except* for our political empaths.

Women aged 18-54 actually doubled down on the concept with 51 percent of them saying they were more likely to support ethnic studies in schools once they learned about the true agenda. Again, self-interest does not explain this shift.

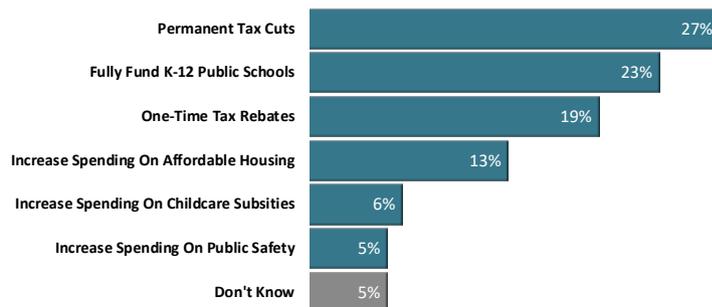
Another topic where our political empaths stood out was on the concept of paid family leave, something Gov. Tim Walz and the new Democratic legislative majorities are likely to move forward in 2023. Not surprisingly, the concept of paid



photo-denver / Shutterstock.com

Figure 7: Permanent tax cuts and funding for K-12 public schools top Minnesotans' wish list for the budget surplus.

"As you may know, the state of Minnesota currently has the largest budget surplus in history. With this in mind, what should be done with the \$9 billion surplus?"



family leave is very popular with Minnesotans with 74 percent favoring it and only 23 percent against. But the devil is in the details. Support falls when respondents learned paid leave proposals will require a new state government bureaucracy with hundreds of new employees. With that information, 56 percent were less likely to support it.

Support for family leave did not necessarily fall once respondents learned it would require a new payroll tax on every employer and every employee. In fact, 47 percent were more likely to support it with the tax and only 41 percent were less likely. Our political empaths drove this result with 57 percent of them saying they were more likely to support paid family leave if it included a tax.

Next, we asked respondents about their thoughts regarding the record setting state budget surplus. A strong plurality of Minnesotans preferred tax cuts over spending when asked how the legislature should use a projected budget surplus in 2023. Forty-six percent of respondents chose permanent tax cuts (27 percent) or a one-time tax rebate (19 percent) when asked what should be done with the surplus. The next most popular choice was fully funding education, and our political empaths led the way on this answer with 30 percent of the subgroup making this choice. Women 18-54 have little interest in cutting taxes with only 19 percent favoring a permanent tax cut and 9 percent favoring a one-time rebate, by far the lowest numbers of any subgroup.

While support for Walz's plan to convert Minnesota to 100 percent renewable energy has fallen significantly since last year, our political empaths remain strongly in favor. Support for the environment has always been a luxury for voters — when things are going well, Minnesotans care about climate change. When the economy is suffering, people care more about bread-and-butter issues. Only 51 percent of Minnesotans support Walz's renewable energy mandate, down from 58 percent last year, with most of the erosion coming from political independents. True to form, our empaths still support the governor's plan 65 percent to 27 percent.

In short, using traditional demographics to categorize voters is not as relevant as it once was, and political messaging can be a powerful tool in shaping attitudes and motivations underlying the issues. If the liberal agenda is to be countered this legislative session, conservatives need to meet voters where they are to change hearts and minds — and eventually votes. ★

FIGURE 8: Support for the governor's energy plan has eroded over the past year.

"First, thinking about energy policy, do you SUPPORT or OPPOSE Governor Tim Walz's plan to require one hundred percent of Minnesota's energy to come from renewable sources such as wind and solar by the year 2040?"

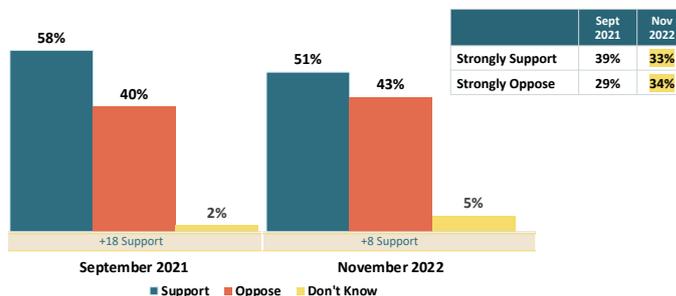


FIGURE 9: Independents no longer support Governor Walz's energy plan.

Support for Governor Walz's energy plan.

	September 2021		November 2022		Net Support
	Support	Opposed	Support	Opposed	
Republicans	21%	77%	15%	83%	-68
Independents	57%	37%	43%	43%	±0
Democrats	91%	7%	87%	8%	+79
Men Ages 18-54	46%	52%	42%	54%	-12
Men Ages 55+	48%	50%	41%	54%	-13
Women Ages 18-54	73%	24%	65%	27%	+38
Women Ages 55+	62%	34%	55%	40%	+15
Twin Cities	75%	23%	69%	27%	+42
MSP Suburbs	56%	40%	55%	40%	+15
Rest Of State	45%	52%	36%	57%	-21

TAKE THE MONEY AND RUN

Minnesotans voted for a narrow Democrat majority in the state. Will those leaders now double down on even more progressive policies? Not on our watch.



John Hinderaker

But one thing we know for sure: There has never been a more important time to stand firm on behalf of policies that benefit all Americans, and all Minnesotans.

The cover story in the fall issue of *Thinking Minnesota* was “Minnesota Malaise.” It was based on the *Thinking Minnesota* Poll, which found deep dissatisfaction among Minnesotans across a broad range of issues, and a shocking 56 percent of Minnesotans expect the next generation to be worse off than we are.

The familiar right track/wrong track questions consistently found that a large majority of Americans think our country is moving in the wrong direction. Not surprisingly, then, nearly all observers expected the 2022 election to bring about change, and maybe a major upheaval.

But it didn’t happen. To an extraordinary degree, 2022 was a status quo election. In Minnesota, the statewide candidates all won reelection, and only a handful of legislative seats changed hands.

Political scientists will debate the question of why a visibly discontented electorate nevertheless voted to stay with the status quo. But one thing we know for sure: There has never been a more important time to stand firm on behalf of policies that benefit all Americans, and all Minnesotans.

In Minnesota, the legislative session is underway. Some legislative leaders apparently think that November’s election was a mandate for a sharp turn to the left. It appears there will be a strong push to legalize recreational marijuana; to legalize sports gambling; and to liberalize the state’s abortion laws — although it is hard to see how they could be more liberal.

Meanwhile, special interests are waiting to carve up the projected budget surplus of more than \$17 billion. There is no shortage of ways to spend it, with still more billions on K-12 education at the top of the list. Never mind that Minnesota’s spending on the public schools has gone up and up for decades, while the results

achieved by those schools has declined. One thing we have conclusively proved is that more dollars do not produce better-educated students.

Rather than more spending, the legislature should focus on something that will actually produce better results: real school choice.

American Experiment will be working hard throughout the session to get meaningful school choice enacted. If school choice doesn’t become law, we will hold accountable those who voted against it, or who refused to allow it to come up for a vote at all.

Liberals want to use the surplus as an opportunity to dramatically expand state spending. But let’s look at the numbers. Around \$6 billion is structural, i.e., Minnesota’s tax rates are too high. That overtaxation should be returned to the taxpayers in the form of permanent tax cuts.

The remaining \$11 billion or more of the surplus is a one-time event. A portion of the federal government’s money-printing spree, which gave rise to the inflation we are now experiencing, has made its way into the coffers of state government. There will be no similar windfall next year or the year after. It is therefore critical that this money not be spent. Instead, it should be used for permanent tax cuts, or rebated to those who paid it. If, instead, this one-time windfall is spent in 2023, it will become part of the permanent budget. In the next budget year, it will come around again, likely with a proposed 10 percent increase. But there will be no federal windfall to pay for it.

To nearly everyone’s surprise, Minnesotans voted to keep the status quo in 2022. What they did *not* vote for was a hard lurch to the left on both social and economic issues. Reinforcing that lesson will be part of American Experiment’s mission in the coming year. ★

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