

**FACTS VERSUS  
FICTION**

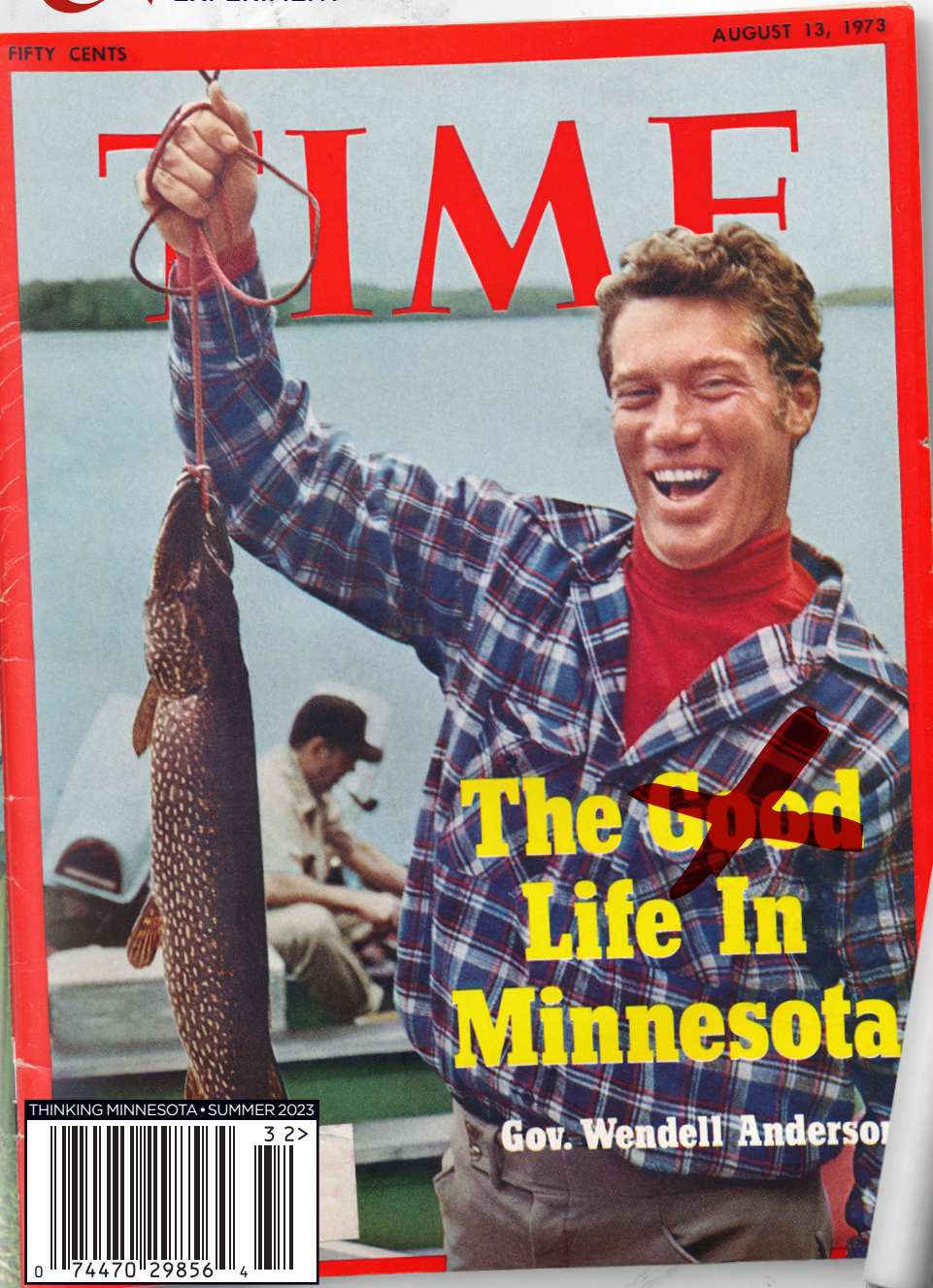
The truth about racial disparities  
in Minnesota's criminal justice system.



# THINKING MINNESOTA



ISSUE 32  
SUMMER 2023  
\$4.95



History  
Revisited

## STATE OF OUR STATE

50 years  
after its  
*TIME* cover  
story, **does**  
Minnesota  
**still work?**

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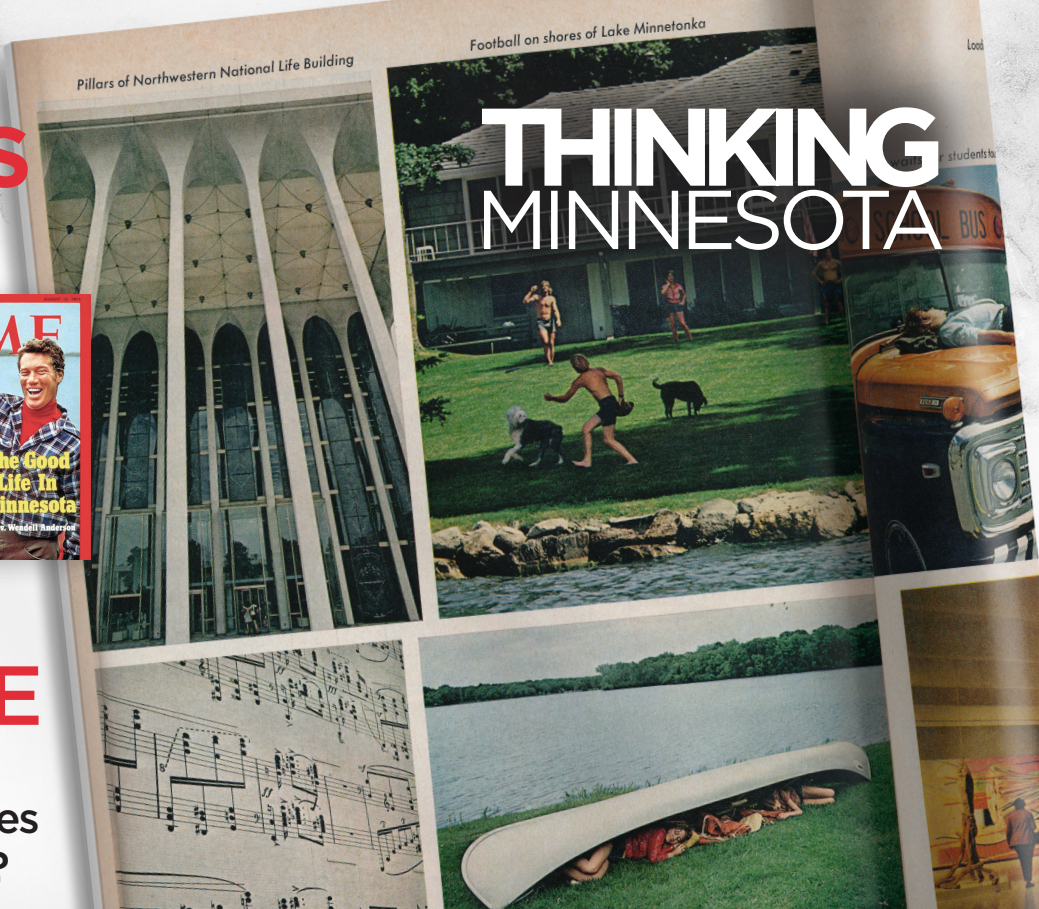
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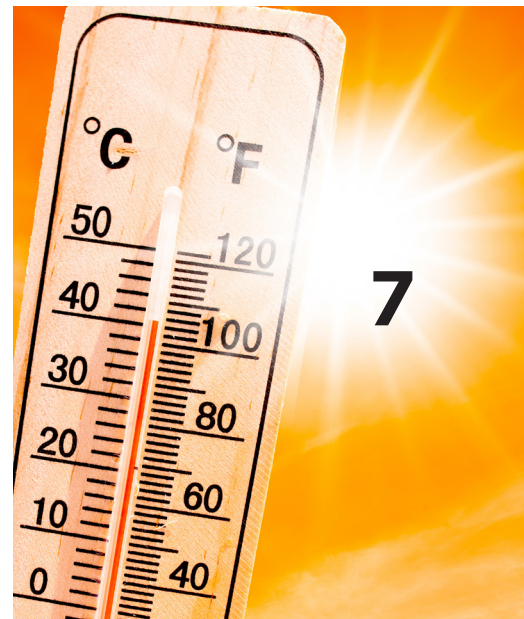
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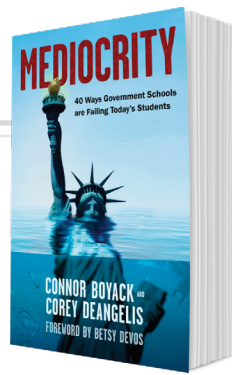
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# THINKING MINNESOTA

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# WE SHALL OVERCOME

The path to undoing the radical output of the 2023 legislature begins with the fact that most Minnesotans disapprove of them.

“Elections have consequences,” stated former Pres. Barack Obama on Minnesota’s 2023 legislature.

All Minnesotans watched, most in horror, as Democrats used their unchallenged control of the governorship and the House and Senate to run up a costly and unprecedented array of radical new laws this past legislative session that each stuck a thumb in the eye of moderate and conservative sensibilities.

This issue of *Thinking Minnesota* is possibly the only place you’ll read about how the unconstrained liberal majorities overwhelmed the outnumbered Republicans. With a boorish spirit and ghastly judgment, they drained the \$18 billion budget surplus, increasing Minnesota’s budget from \$52 billion to \$72 billion. And then, incredibly, they chalked up another \$9 billion in tax increases.

Their path of legislative destruction places our once-thriving state alongside California and Oregon as states who create radical policies to please targeted political constituencies without understanding or appreciating how they will pay for them or how they will impact the average Minnesotan. The DFL passed a bill that will dramatically raise energy prices in future years. They addressed Minnesota’s growing crisis in public safety with a 500-page bill that begins by *reducing* punishments for offenders. They legalized pot and created an array of politically motivated giveaways that included free tuition. They funded thousands of new state government jobs, most notably a 400-person agency that will oversee a costly new program for family leave.



Ron Eibensteiner

Their legacy intentionally makes Minnesota a destination for the trans “community.” They bestowed pedophiles with protected legal status. And Minnesota’s abortionists can now terminate late-term pregnancies, including live births.

And with all their rhetoric about sticking it to the rich, the decidedly un-rich will end up paying the bill through increased fees, sales taxes and gas taxes — and more regulations.

But there is reason to hope that the litany of damage might not endure. The most recent *Thinking Minnesota* Poll (found in this issue of the magazine) discovered that Minnesotans reject the much-hyped victories of the 2023 legislature, sometimes with overwhelming

distaste. Only 37 percent rated their work as “excellent” or “good.” Most Minnesotans — 59 percent — rated their work as “only fair” or “poor,” while individual components of the DFL agenda fare much worse. Fifty-one percent of Minnesotans said their state was on the “wrong track,” a record number for historically optimistic Minnesotans.

These might be the most illuminating survey results we’ve ever published. The poll likely understates Minnesota’s distaste for that litany of extremist laws when we consider that most Minnesotans learned about them solely through local media’s fawning, worshipful reporting. (I, for one, have never seen such examples of naked media bias. The *Star Tribune* headline writers must have struggled through the weeks to find synonyms for “historic” and “transformational.”)

Future legislatures can unravel virtually everything passed in 2023, but it will take a significant effort. Here are a couple thoughts about how we, the majority of Minnesotans, might begin the road back.

**Re-engage business.** Not long after the 2023 session of the Minnesota legislature concluded its business, I joined a group of Minnesota business leaders to discuss the aftershocks of that troubling session. The business community needs to step up financially and politically in favor of a pro-growth agenda. It’s an enduring disappointment that the largest corporations in our state — Minnesota Business Partnership types — disdain their long history of leadership and no longer play a role in keeping Minnesota a growth-friendly economy. Too many now think of



themselves as national players and think little about their Minnesota roots. Many aren't from here; some don't even live here. I think of Richard Davis, the former U.S. Bank president who liked to extol the virtues of Minnesota but who, when his career ended, fled the state before having to pay Minnesota taxes on his stock options.

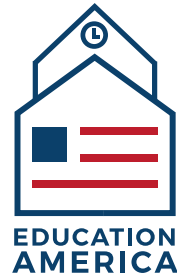
Many other business leaders might have stayed on the sidelines because they thought they weren't needed. House and Senate leaders assured me in separate private meetings that they anticipated adding three seats to its 34-31 majority in the Senate and to add "at least" 12 to 15 in the House, turning a 70-64 advantage for the Democrats into a 76-58 majority for the GOP. Instead, the 2022 elections gave the Democrats a slim 34-33 majority in the Senate and allowed the House Democrats to retain their 70-64 advantage. Despite their razor-thin majorities, the DFL enacted a leftist and extreme agenda at the expense of Minnesota's values and interests.

But there is reason to hope that the **litany of damage might not endure.**

**The issues are on our side.** The GOP's best chance at overturning the 2023 debacle will be to run on a solid agenda of creative and relevant policy proposals, not just personalities. Liberals spend their time (and your money) buying off their constituencies with government payouts. Center-right candidates can't combat them merely with clichés that mock woke policies, disparage high taxes, or re-litigate how the government mishandled COVID. A conservative agenda must show, in detail, how to guarantee objectivity in our classrooms, how to keep our communities safe, and how

unfettered partnerships with business will create opportunities that let all Minnesotans soar. It can also demonstrate practical solutions to keep fuel affordable and show how reduced regulations will unleash affordable housing and bring reasonably-priced childcare. These are just a few of the constructive, winnable issues that will appeal to Minnesotans. And American Experiment is here to help!

I can't conclude without saying a word about Gov. Tim Walz, the most ideologically "flexible" statewide leader in memory. His participation in the 2023 legislative session exposed the convenient plasticity of his "be-for-what's-gonna-happen" political philosophy. It made me think about the devolution of various versions of Tim Walz we've met over the years. As a congressman, he seemed to work hard to be the Republicans' favorite Democrat. He was the likable schoolteacher who served in the Army National Guard and supported main-street business. One year, he was even named the seventh most bipartisan member of Congress. He won his first term as governor by fashioning himself as the reasonable adult who could forge a "One Minnesota" unity by mediating the widening gaps that separated Minnesota's political extremes. And he based his 2022 re-election on a pledge to return \$2,000 of the looming budget surplus — later raised to \$2,600 — to each Minnesotan in the form of "Walz Checks." In the end, he said he was "grateful" when legislative power brokers approved just a \$260 payment to a limited number of Minnesotans, and even that was bound in red tape. Wait. Who's in charge here? It didn't seem to matter so long as he could take credit. Walz eagerly used extravagant ceremonies to sign every extremist bill that reached his desk. And now, as he is adored by liberal apparatchiks nationwide as the architect of Minnesota's Radical Miracle, try to imagine how he'll reconfigure himself for the next wave of political expediency. ★



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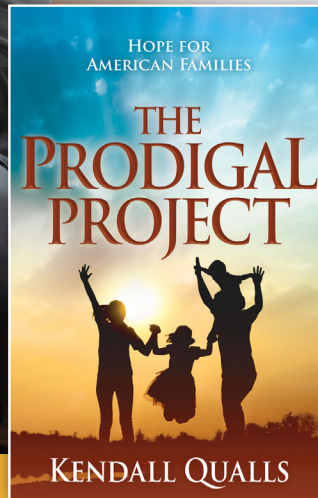
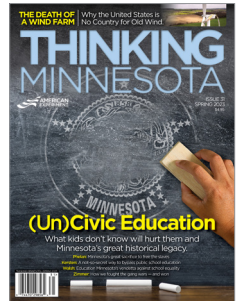
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**Kendall Qualls** is the president of the nonprofit organization TakeChargeMN and executive faculty of Crown College School of Business. His new book will be released later this year. Scan the QR code for more information.

### Taking action

I laud you for your patriotic spirit and desire to work for change in our state. This woke agenda is so troublesome. It flies in the face of all that our forefathers stood for, worked for, and died for. There is a saying that all that is needed for evil to prevail is for good men to do nothing. Thank you for the something you are doing! Each of us can *do* something. Some can serve by giving, public education and promotion, making phone calls, being involved in the planning and orchestrating of plans, administration, and praying. This is what I can and will do. I would like to stay informed of your plans and progress so that I can pray effectively (I'm sure there are others that will be praying as well). The Scripture declares, "The effectual fervent prayer of the righteous avails much." We are righteous because of Christ's righteousness, not because of our own merit.



Through personal stories in *The Prodigal Project*, Kendall Qualls explains that the promise of America is available to anyone regardless of race or social status. In this book, Qualls addresses uncomfortable topics such as the crisis of fatherless homes and the silence of the church in addressing this problem as the main source of disparities, not systemic racism.

In *The Prodigal Project*, Qualls also tackles the threat of the progressive movement against the traditional nuclear family, religious faith, and the values that made the U.S. an exceptional nation.

[KendallQualls.com](http://KendallQualls.com)



*Kathy Warrington*

### Staying the course

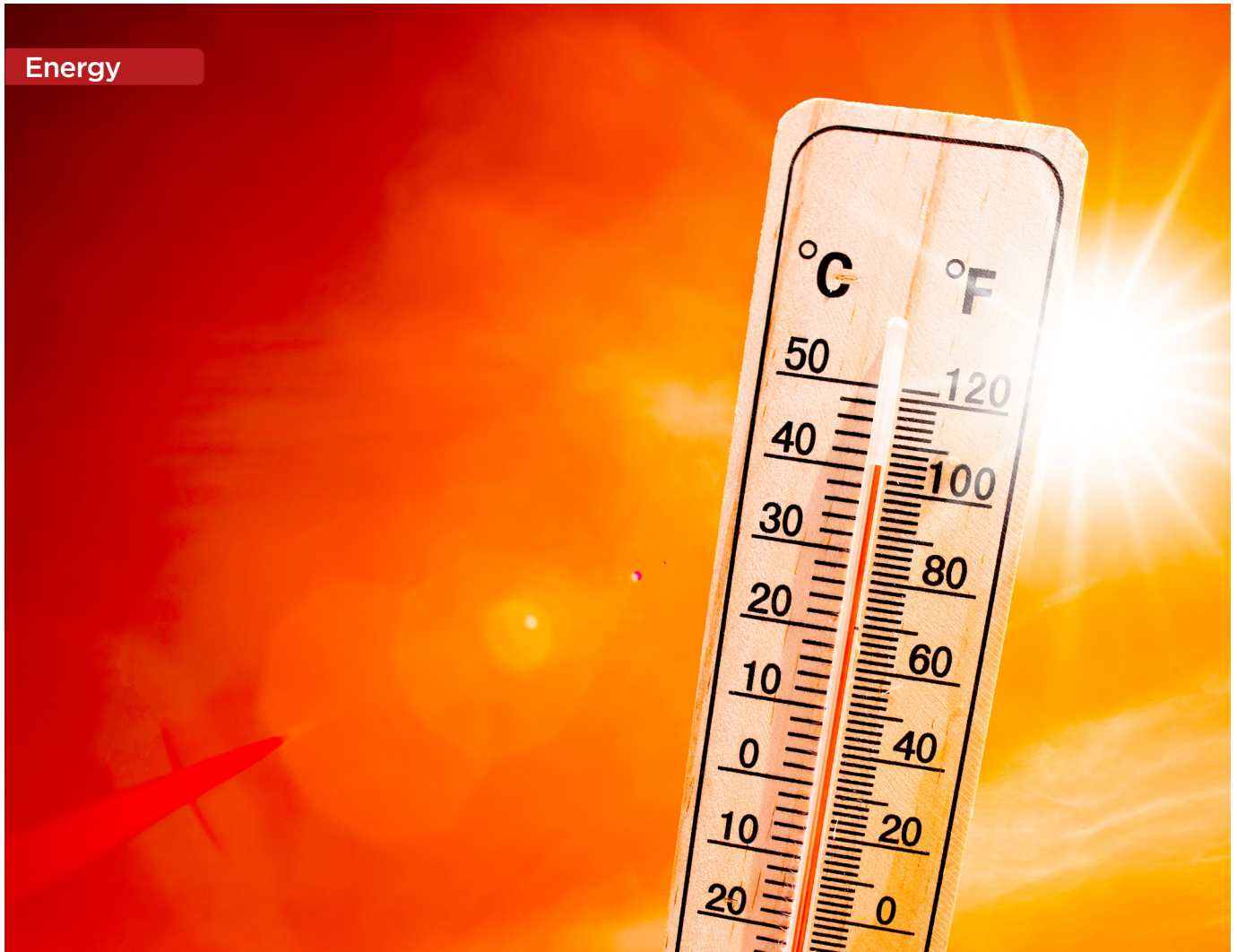
I just want you to know how much I respect and appreciate what you all do for conservatives and libertarians. Twenty years ago, my stances on the issues would have made me a solid Democrat. No political party in the history of this republic has abandoned its core values as fast and as much as the Democrats. My wife and I are not wealthy people. We're just citizens who worked hard to build a better life, pay for our two sons' college education, and pay our taxes. We just signed up for a \$75 per quarter donation. Please understand that to our family, this \$75 is like a \$1 million donation from some liberal tech mogul. Thanks for all you do. There's a little guy out there who loves and appreciates what you do for us.

*Scot Shaft*



# UP FRONT

Energy



## SUMMER BUMMER

Heatwaves could test the nation's electric grid as blackouts loom.

On Wednesday, May 17, the North American Electric Reliability Corporation (NERC) issued its 2023 Summer Reliability Assessment. Summarizing the report, *Utility Dive*, a journalistic and news website reporting on the

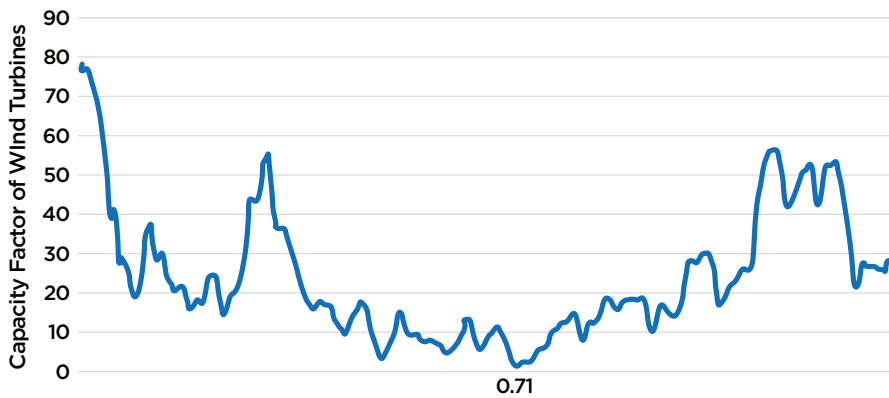
utility industry, noted that most of the United States would face an elevated risk of blackouts should summer weather turn extreme.

Demand for cooling and the performance of wind and solar resources

will be key factors in the grid's performance. The situation has been exacerbated by demand growth and the retirement of coal and nuclear power plants.

All of the areas of the country appear

## Wind Turbine Capacity Factors in MISO June 24, 2021 through July 5, 2021



Sources: U.S. Energy Information Administration, MISO Planning Year 2021-2022 Wind and Solar Capacity Credit

to have enough reliable power plants online to meet normal summer peak electricity demand according to the NERC report, but most of the country will “face risks of electricity supply shortfalls during periods of more extreme summer conditions.”

NERC officials did not mince words when describing the reliability risks the nation faces this summer. “We are facing an absolute step-change,” NERC’s Director of Reliability Assessment and System Analysis John Moura said on a call with reporters. Over the past five years, NERC has seen a “steady deterioration in the risk profile of the grid.”

“The system is close to its edge... managing the pace of retirements is critical,” he said.

A common thread of *Utility Dive*’s reporting was how the performance of unreliable wind and solar resources would impact grid reliability.

*In the Midcontinent ISO territory, “wind generator performance during periods of high demand is a key factor in determining whether there is sufficient electricity supply on the system to maintain reliability,” NERC said.*

*In the Southwest Power Pool, if wind output falls below normal, the grid operator “can face energy*

*challenges in meeting extreme peak demand or managing periods of thermal or hydro generator outages.”*

*In Texas, “dispatchable generation may not be sufficient to meet reserves during an extreme heat wave that is accompanied by low winds.”*

*In the Western Interconnection, NERC said wide-area heat events can expose some assessment areas to a risk of energy supply shortfalls “as each area relies on regional transfers to meet demand at peak and the late afternoon to evening hours when energy output from the area’s vast solar PV resources are diminished.”*

If you are dependent on the wind to blow in the summertime, you are in big trouble.

Data from the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) show wind generation can virtually reach zero during hot summer days. To depend on wind to meet surging electricity demand is to gamble with grid reliability. Maybe it will work, maybe it won’t.

Policymakers in America need to stop allowing reliable coal, natural gas, and nuclear plants to close down before there are reliable, dispatchable power

plants to replace them.

This should be common sense, but state lawmakers and Pres. Joe Biden’s Environmental Protection Agency continue to pass laws and regulations that make it more difficult to keep reliable coal and natural gas plants in operation. The end result will be widespread rolling blackouts that harm American families and businesses.

The biggest tragedy in this situation



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**Data from the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) show wind generation can virtually reach zero during hot summer days. To depend on wind to meet surging electricity demand is to gamble with grid reliability.**

is that the blackouts are entirely foreseeable and preventable, but the Biden administration and liberal state lawmakers are intent on pushing policies that make them inevitable. Elections have consequences. ★

—Isaac Orr





# MINNESOTA'S LEADING CONSERVATIVE VOICE

**For 33 years, Center of the American Experiment has been Minnesota's leading voice on behalf of freedom and conservative common sense. Most often, that voice has been that of American Experiment staff and policy fellows.**

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

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## An Election Win — Without an Election

The Minnesota Supreme Court pulls back the absentee ballot reins.

Last summer, *Thinking Minnesota* reported on how the Minnesota Voters Alliance (MVA) was challenging a rule from the Minnesota secretary of state governing absentee ballots. The Minnesota Court of Appeals rejected MVA's

challenge, but the Minnesota Supreme Court granted a review of their decision. In May 2023, the Supreme Court ruled partially in favor of MVA and partially in favor of the Minnesota secretary of state.

The MVA, represented by the Upper Midwest Law Center (UMLC), argued that the secretary of state's rule directly conflicted with existing Minnesota statute. If true, the secretary of state would be overstepping his authority, and the rule would be struck down.

The rule in question was actually established back in 2010. That year, just 23,237 absentee ballots were cast. But in 2020, that number jumped to 1.9 million ballots, and people — such as the MVA — started paying attention to the absentee ballot verification rules and how the secretary of state was interpreting them.

Minnesota has a straightforward absentee voting process. First, any eligible voter requests an absentee ballot. Once his application is approved, the voter receives in the mail four components: a ballot, a tan ballot envelope, a white signature envelope, and a larger white return envelope. The voter fills out his ballot and places it inside the ballot envelope. The voter then fills out the signature envelope with his name, address, and identification number (his driver's license number, Minnesota ID card number, or the last four digits of his Social Security number), and signs it. He then places the ballot envelope into the signature envelope and seals it. Finally, he places the completed signature envelope into the mailing envelope and sends it to be reviewed and counted.

Prior to the court's ruling, the current secretary of state was interpreting key elements of the rule (8210.2450) somewhat loosely. There are six reasons an absentee ballot might be rejected upon arrival, but only two matter in this case. First, if “the voter” did not sign the signature envelope; second, if the voter's ID number on the signature envelope does not match the ID number on his absentee ballot application (or his voter record). If the identification numbers do not match, the voter has one more



chance for acceptance: if the signature on the signature envelope matches the signature on the ballot application.

The Minnesota secretary of state argued that the questions, “Did the voter sign the certification on the envelope?” and “Is there a signature on the envelope?” were the exact same. In other words, any signature, even one showing a different name than on the ballot, met the legislative requirement. The Minnesota Supreme Court ultimately disagreed, ending that interpretation.

The court ruled that the signature on a voter’s certification envelope must belong to the person for whom the ballot is intended — as MVA argued. But at the same time, to avoid nitpicking

“Don’t fear the system, vote any way that works for you, and help your friends and neighbors to make sure their votes get in.”

—James Dickey,  
senior trial counsel for UMLC

over small differences in signatures, the only legitimate reason to reject a signature (under this initial part of the analysis) is if the name is “clearly different” than the name printed on the envelope, which “foreclose[s] a comparison of the voter’s signatures,” as Minnesota Supreme Court Chief Justice Lorie Gildea wrote in her opinion. In other words, if the signature on the signature envelope fairly represents the name on the envelope — they both say “John Doe,” not “John Doe” and “Mickey Mouse” — the ballot is acceptable, at least so far.

To avoid rejecting a ballot, ballot board members must also be satisfied that the identification numbers on the signature envelope and the original

ballot application match. If they don’t match, the election judges on the ballot board must compare signatures between the two documents. The court confirmed that if the signatures match, the ballot satisfies that requirement. MVA was concerned that the secretary and local officials had been interpreting the rule to allow any signature to work on either document, theoretically using the physical disability accommodation in the law. However, the court assured Minnesotans that “only those with physical writing disabilities can use alternative means of signing applications and envelopes.” And importantly, siding expressly with MVA, the court ruled that if the identification number on a voter’s signature envelope does not match the ID number on his absentee voter application, a signature review must be performed **only by a party-balanced election judge** — not a regular ballot board member appointed by a potentially partisan county auditor. The court also clarified the acceptable usage of nicknames when evaluating signatures.

What does this mean for the average Minnesota voter? Get out and vote!

“We’re pleased with this decision,” said James Dickey, senior trial counsel for UMLC. “But the days of voting only after 3 p.m. on election day are over. The absentee ballot board doesn’t know who you’re voting for when they decide to accept or reject a ballot, and the Minnesota secretary of state interprets the law to accept every absentee ballot possible. So, there is no reason to ever miss an election again because of bad weather or if work gets in the way. Don’t fear the system, vote any way that works for you, and help your friends and neighbors to make sure their votes get in. And remember, there are people watching, like the Minnesota Voters Alliance and the Upper Midwest Law Center, to make sure your ballot is safe and everything is done correctly.” ★

—Grace Bureau



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## Armed and... Less Dangerous?

Nearly 1 in 5 teachers would carry a gun to school if allowed.

**A**rise in school safety concerns has reignited the controversial topic of arming teachers, with nearly one in five K-12 educators saying they would choose to carry a firearm at school if allowed, according to a recent national survey by the RAND Corporation.

Close to 1,000 teachers randomly selected were asked their “views of safety in their schools, including their main safety concerns, perceptions of security measures in place, the effect of those

measures on school climate, and whether they were concerned for their own safety and that of their students.”

On the specific issue of firearms in school, teachers were asked whether allowing educators to carry firearms would make schools more or less safe and whether teachers would personally carry a firearm if given the choice to do so. Much the same as public opinion, the surveyed teachers were divided on the topic.

*Fifty-four percent of the nationally representative sample of teachers reported believing that teachers carrying firearms will make schools less safe, 20 percent reported believing that it will make schools safer, and the final 26 percent reported feeling that it would make schools neither more nor less safe.*

...  
*When asked whether they would choose to carry a firearm if their school implemented a program where teachers could be armed, 19 percent of teachers overall said yes. Although a clear minority, this share nevertheless translates into roughly 550,000 teachers nationally with interest in personally carrying firearms.*

More than half of surveyed teachers felt that their school’s physical security measures (such as locks, ID badges, cam-

**Only five percent  
of teachers overall  
selected active  
shooters as  
their largest  
safety concern.**

eras, and security staff) positively affected school climate. Only five percent reported that such measures had a negative effect.

But when asked about their number one safety concern, *bullying* — rather than active shooters — was selected. Only five percent of teachers overall selected active shooters as their largest safety concern.

Based on the survey results, RAND suggested further research and analysis that includes:

- Studying early adopter schools or school districts that have more-ex-



pansive versions of teacher-carry programs to understand how they work in practice.

- Conducting a comprehensive cost-benefit analysis of programs allowing teacher-carry.
- Developing risk analysis approaches that balance both frequent, lower-level forms of school violence (such as bullying) and less likely extreme

- Better characterizing the combined effects of school security measures and strategies on safety, school climate, and student attendance and academic performance.
- Taking the pulse of parents, teachers, administrators, and students about school safety measures and disaggregating the feedback by type of community to triangulate their views on

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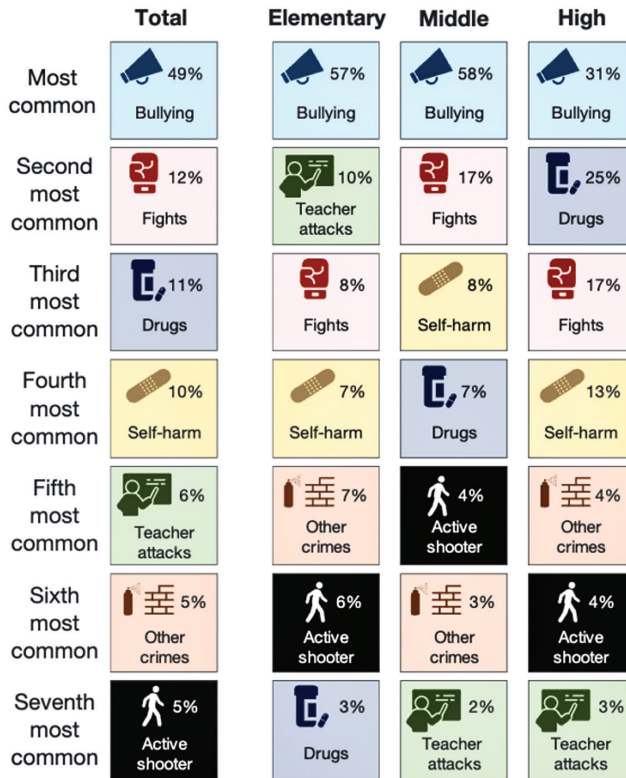
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Top School Safety Concerns, Fall 2022

Estimated percentage of teachers by school grade level who said that various school safety topics pose the largest safety concern at their school



Source: RAND

forms of school violence (such as shootings).

- Developing a deeper understanding of the sources of teachers' safety concerns.
- Identifying how fears of victimization and other safety concerns contribute to teacher and principal turnover and to student enrollment, attendance and academic performance.

school safety.

Considering the recent spate of violence — everything from bullying and fistfights to shootings — in Minnesota's public schools, the legislature missed a huge opportunity this past session to prioritize the safety of teachers, staff, and students. For their sake, let us hope school safety won't get brushed aside again. ★

—Catrin Wigfall

# News of Note in Minnesota

Center events, initiatives, and policy work.



American Experiment's Freedom Rally in the Capitol Rotunda on April 4.

## Freedom Rally

Hundreds of Minnesotans converged at the State Capitol on April 4 to rally for freedom at American Experiment's "Stop the Madness" event. Speakers included American Experiment policy fellows, legislative leaders, and public policy leaders. American Experiment President John Hinderaker led the crowd gathered in the Rotunda in chants of "It's our surplus, give it back!" The sound echoed throughout the building and drifted into the Senate and House chambers, where members were meeting for the last time before their spring break.

## Annual Dinner

On Friday, May 12, American Experiment hosted its Annual Dinner at the Hilton Minneapolis hotel. Dennis Prager, one of the leading thinkers in American public life, long-time radio host, author, and founder of the Prager University Foundation, delivered the keynote address. He also introduced PragerU's Amala Ekpunobi, a 21-year-old former leftist and now a podcasting and social

media expert. Of the event, Center President John Hinderaker remarked, "It's the biggest conservative event every year in the state of Minnesota. Dennis Prager being our keynote speaker at our annual dinner speaks to the intellectual, cultural, and political stakes at play not only in this state but across the country. American Experiment has always been at the forefront of the fight, and tonight really emphasizes that."

American Experiment's Impact Video, shown during the dinner, highlights the influence the Center and its policy fellows have had on state policy. State senators and representatives, as well as average Minnesotans, are featured discussing the important work being done in a crucial time of change for the state. The five-minute video can be viewed on American Experiment's website ([AmericanExperiment.org/multimedia](http://AmericanExperiment.org/multimedia)).

## Beyond the Metro

A crowd of over 100 attendees was on hand Thursday evening, June 15, at The Cactus Event Center in Perham to celebrate the inauguration of American Experiment's West Central Minnesota chapter. As part of American Experiment's commitment to turning positive, conservative-minded ideas into reality for every Minnesotan, the expanding Greater Minnesota chapters have been crucial. Micah Olson, the Center's Greater Minnesota outreach director, says, "The purpose of these chapters is to amplify our reach in every corner of the state. We have five chapters so far. Each one is tasked with growing our networking and providing leadership in their area to represent the Center."

American Experiment President John Hinderaker was the featured speaker delivering remarks about the devastating effects of the 2023 legislative session and about how the Center is fighting to restore Minnesota's future through sound public policy and grassroots activism. Ben Anderson leads the West Central chapter, which covers Alexandria, Fergus Falls, Perham, Ottertail, and Detroit Lakes.



American Experiment's West Central chapter launch reception in Perham, Minn., on June 15.



**Summer tour**

Over the next two months, American Experiment policy experts will visit nearly 20 cities across the state, unpacking the 2023 legislative session and pointing out common-sense solutions for Minnesota’s slow (but steady) climb back to sanity. Participants will enjoy a broad overview of the session from American Experiment policy fellows and speakers who will also answer questions about how the legislature impacted policies including economy, public safety, energy, education, and more. An event schedule is posted on American Experiment’s website, along with featured speakers and topics at each venue. New t-shirts will also be available for purchase featuring our “Stay & Fight” initiative based on



Center Economist John Phelan’s article, which can be found in this issue. Go to [AmericanExperiment.org/Events](http://AmericanExperiment.org/Events) for tour dates, times, and locations.

**New initiative**

Farmers throughout Minnesota asked for American Experiment’s help in calling attention to the folly of wind and solar covering productive farmland. As a

result, American Experiment launched a billboard campaign pointing out, “Wind and solar are not the answer.” Liberal energy policies are causing farmers throughout Minnesota to be bombarded by wind and solar companies eager to cash in on lucrative federal subsidies by building wind turbines and solar panels on prime farmland.

Wind and solar companies are promising easy cash, monthly payments, and no maintenance, but they fail to tell farmers about disposal costs, how fast the turbines and panels will be obsolete, and their reliance on metals from the Congo or China. In addition to billboards, small yard signs are also available with the same “Wind and solar are not the answer” message. Email [info@americanexperiment.org](mailto:info@americanexperiment.org) to have one delivered to your home. ★

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## Spending Spree

Where did the \$18 billion surplus go?

If Minnesota's \$17.6 billion surplus were to be divided equally among all taxpayers, each would get approximately \$5,800. But unless you're a senior receiving Social Security or a low-income taxpayer, you will see your taxes go up beginning July of this year. So, what did our lawmakers do with the state's humongous surplus?

To be clear, the legislature is giving *some* of that surplus back — in multiple forms. But to call it a tax cut would be a misstatement. Of the \$3 billion that the DFL set aside for tax cuts, for example, \$1.3 billion is for a one-time rebate check of \$260 (for single filers). But only single tax filers whose income is less than \$75,000 qualify.

The second component of this so-called tax cut is the new child tax credit. Again, the only way to get any money

back under this credit is if you make roughly \$50,000 (married and filing jointly) and \$44,000 (any other filer). If you are a middle-income family, tough luck. As for taxes on Social Security, most seniors for whom this is targeted already pay no taxes on these benefits.

According to tax data, a little over one in every four Minnesota tax filers did not pay income taxes in 2018. This was because of two reasons: (1) Either tax filers made so little that they had no taxable income after counting deductions and exemptions, or (2) refundable tax credits reduced their tax liability to zero or negative, in which case they get a refund from the state government. Giving a handout to people who already pay little to no income taxes is not a tax cut.

But even if the whole \$3 billion was used for actual tax cuts, that's still

less than a *fifth* of Minnesota's budget surplus. Instead of giving taxpayers their money back, the DFL has used nearly the entire surplus to *expand* government to an unprecedented size, at the same time *raising* taxes by about \$9 billion.

The baseline budget for the 2024-25 biennium was \$55.5 billion. By the end of the session, however, the new budget has been set at a record-breaking \$71.5 billion — a 29 percent increase. Compared to spending from the 2022-2023 biennium, this is nearly a 40 percent increase. Some of this money is one-time spending, but even the baseline budget in the 2026-27 biennium is \$13 billion higher than what we spent in the just-ended biennium.

The Democrats used the surplus to expand existing programs and create new ones. For every \$100 the state government spends, roughly \$40 goes to E-12 education. Yet the state voted to spend billions more of the surplus on it, partly to provide free lunches to children whose families are not lacking. Welfare is also a big state expenditure, capturing nearly a third of state spending, getting over \$4 billion in the next four years.

Further, legislators have voted to spend hundreds of millions to increase welfare cash benefits and make it easier for people to stay on welfare; give hundreds of millions of dollars to childcare providers; spend additional hundreds of millions on childcare assistance; eliminate cost sharing for individuals on the state's Medicaid program; and offer subsidized health care insurance to illegal immigrants. The North Star Promise program will provide free college to some low-income Minnesotans, including illegal immigrants. Native Americans, who already get scholarships under some programs, will get free college as well. Minnesota's biggest grant system has been expanded, and so have other higher ed assistance programs. In housing, the state will spend hundreds of millions to hand people money for down payments

and help others pay rent.

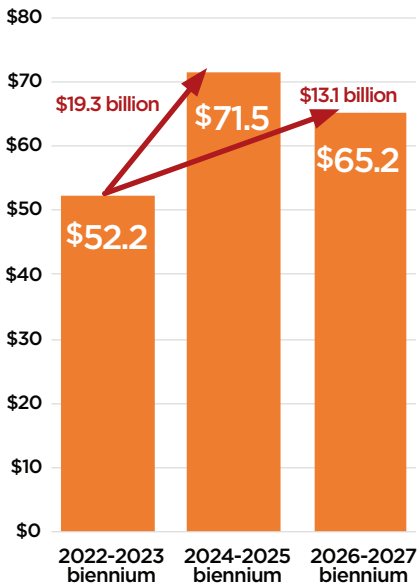
Businesses that suffered during the unrest that followed the death of George Floyd will receive hundreds of millions of taxpayer money to rebuild. The state's paid family and medical leave will cost taxpayers over a billion dollars — just to get started. Bicyclists will get a \$1,500 tax credit for electric bikes, and the Northern Express train, which is supposed to connect Duluth to the Twin Cities, will cost taxpayers \$200 million. Numerous credits for businesses, like the film tax credit and Angel tax credit, have been expanded or prolonged.

Minnesotans are some of the most heavily taxed people in the United States, a factor that is largely to blame for our economy's mediocre performance. The \$18 billion surplus was a golden opportunity to change that. Instead of giving taxpayers their money back, Democrats increased the size of the government, all the while putting us on the hook for even more taxes. ★

—Martha Njolomole

## Other People's Money

General fund spending by the end of the 2023 legislative session, excluding inflation (billion \$)



Source: Minnesota Senate

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TOM STEWARD

## TRAINWRECK

Time to pull the plug on the Northstar Commuter Rail.

**Y**ou have to wonder how much worse things need to get when it comes to the Met Council's mismanagement of a Metro Transit system that's nothing short of a national embarrassment. Met Council Chairman Charlie Zelle oversees the most crime-ridden light rail system in the country, as detailed in the last issue of *Thinking Minnesota*. The biggest public works project in state history, the Southwest Light Rail Transit line — still under construction — has come to define boondoggle under Zelle, doubling from \$1.25 billion to \$2.7 billion in cost while lagging nearly a decade behind schedule. Meanwhile, the Met Council czar

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**“Shut it down and  
stop the bleeding.”**

—Anoka County Commissioner  
Scott Schulte

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also heads one of the nation's worst-performing commuter rail lines, Northstar, which runs from Big Lake to Target Field. Compared with similar lines, it has the lowest ridership and highest taxpayer subsidy per passenger.

The per-passenger subsidy for every ride on the Northstar Commuter Rail catapulted from \$19 per passenger in 2019 to \$173 in 2021 — an increase of 800 percent following a devastating decline in ridership post-COVID. But then, what do you expect from an operation that barely manages to take in \$500,000 a year in passenger fares, while spending up to \$18 million to get riders where



Tom Steward

they're going?

In fact, Northstar has never been on track since opening for business in late 2009, even in the best of times. The \$320 million train line fell short of passenger projections out of the gate, never drawing the 897,000 riders planners promised for the first year, much less any year since. At its peak of popularity, Northstar nearly notched 800,000 boardings in 2017 and 2019, before plummeting to 50,000 passengers in 2021, followed by 77,000 riders last year.

In an act of desperation, the Met Council cut service to just two roundtrips on weekdays only, ending weekend trains for Twins games and special events, which previously accounted for about one-third of ridership. “Ridership has

been slow to rebound, especially among traditional commuters,” according to a new Met Council study focusing on Northstar's bleak future.

While Northstar limps along, other commuter rail lines across the country have steadily bounced back. The Met Council report admitted that “many of Northstar's peer agencies seem to have stronger prospects for recovering from the pandemic than Northstar... most of Northstar's peers are actively planning to expand and improve their commuter rail service...” Our own analysis shows that 2022 ridership on Northstar remained at just 10 percent of pre-pandemic levels, while every other peer line identified by the Met Council regained substantially higher shares of ridership — ranging from 23 percent in San Diego to 83 percent in New England.

“That's a significant challenge when we have a service that costs as much and just isn't generating the level of ridership that it used to,” said Met Council's Cole Hiniker in discussing the \$175,000 study's findings in March. “Add on top of that the fact that the actual ridership projections for the corridor were much higher when it was built and justified for the funding.”

Northstar's rock-bottom ridership numbers have only strengthened the resolve of the Anoka County Board in an increasingly bitter standoff with the Met Council over footing the bill for the county's share of the line's substantial operating subsidy. This spring, the board's finance committee recommended no payment whatsoever given Northstar's dismal ridership record.



The per-passenger subsidy for every ride on the Northstar Commuter Rail catapulted from \$19 per passenger in 2019 to \$173 in 2021 — an increase of 800 percent following a devastating decline in ridership post-COVID.

“The revenues are \$500,000, the expenses are \$18 million,” said Anoka County Commissioner Jeff Reinert at a March board meeting on Northstar funding. “If McDonald’s was running a business that way, they would give away 35 hamburgers for every one they sold and that’s ridiculous.”

Since the pandemic, Anoka County commissioners have refused to pay the full amount billed by Metro Transit on the grounds that fewer trains and riders should result in reduced service costs for the agency’s partners. The county

got its bill reduced from \$6.2 million to \$4.5 million in 2020, but has refused to pay more than \$1.95 million per year since. A tense April meeting between commissioners and Zelle to resolve their differences went nowhere.

“If they want to go legal, I told them I have plenty of attorneys standing by, so you let us know,” Anoka County Board Chairman Matt Look said in an interview. “When they unilaterally reduce trips by 71.4 percent, that’s on them.”

Two years ago, the Anoka County Board chairman at the time called for Northstar to be mothballed in favor of an express bus line.

“A decade-plus is more than enough to see that Northstar is not the right public transit option for our communities — it’s underused and oversubsidized,” Anoka County Commissioner Scott Schulte wrote in the *Star Tribune*. “Shut it down and stop the bleeding.”

It’s generally accepted that a shut-down would be contingent on negotiating a waiver exempting the Met Council from repaying federal funding, anywhere from \$75 to \$160 million. Yet, in a last-ditch effort to save Northstar, DFL members in control of the legislature doubled down. They authorized yet another study on the feasibility of extending the failed line to St. Cloud, while allowing a GOP-backed provision requiring analysts to examine shuttering Northstar once and for all.

“Northstar has never met expectations and it’s losing more money than we ever dreamed of,” said Rep. Jon Koznick, R-Lakeville, a longtime proponent of eliminating Northstar. “It’s totally appropriate for the legislature to seriously examine terminating the operation of Northstar. Even some transit advocates seem to realize it’s worthy of studying.”

By every measure, it’s well past the time for legislators to get on board with pulling the plug on the Northstar Commuter Rail. ★

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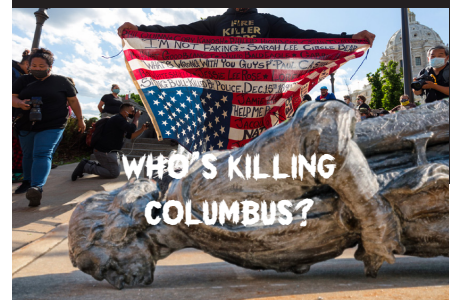
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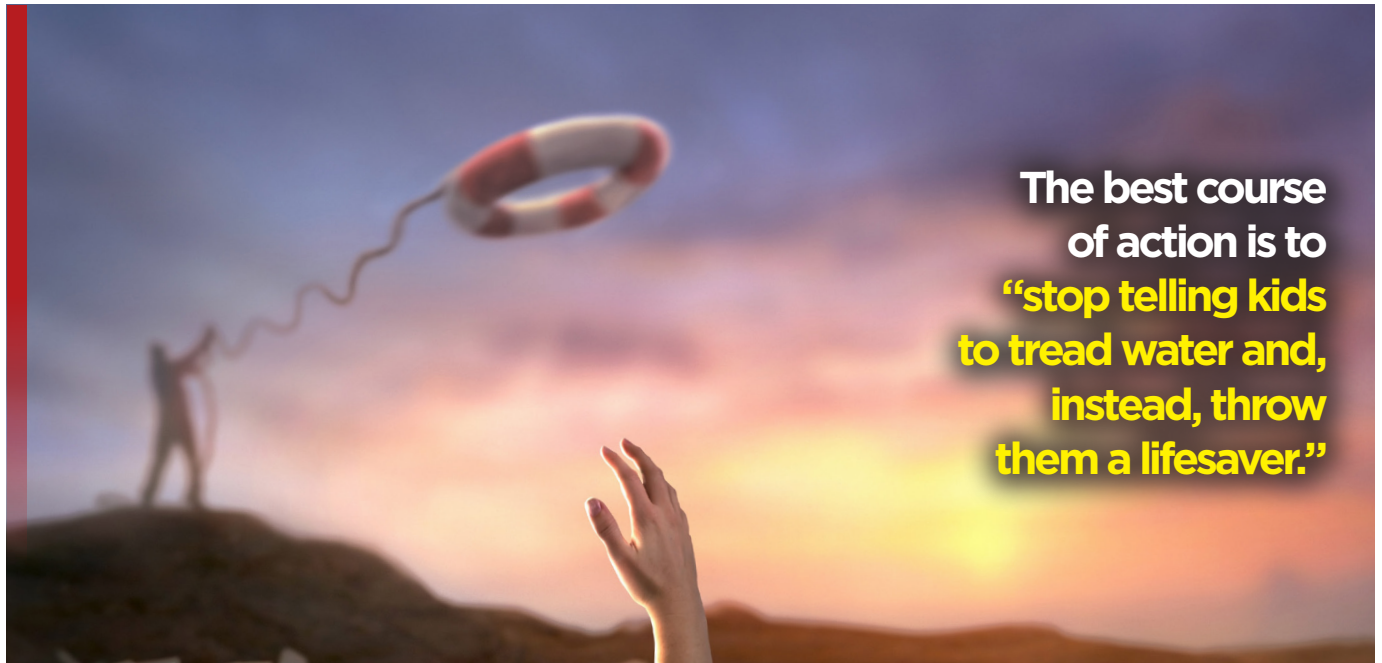
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The best course of action is to “stop telling kids to tread water and, instead, throw them a lifesaver.”

## Aspirations of Mediocrity

A revealing book about government schools details the desperate need for change.

**F**orty years ago, the United States National Commission on Excellence in Education warned in its report “A Nation at Risk” that the “educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a nation and a people.” [Emphasis added.]

Sadly, despite the years that have passed since, this warning about the sorry state of government schools rings just as true today, if not more so, as it did in 1983.

In their latest book, Connor Boyack and Corey DeAngelis detail how the tide of mediocrity is now a tsunami of low expectations and poor performance, suggesting the desperate need for alternative solutions.

*Mediocrity: 40 Ways Government*

*Schools are Failing Today's Students* — with the number 40 chosen in reference to 40 years since “A Nation at Risk” — is not a book of solutions, but rather a book that focuses on the problems plaguing America’s government schools and, like any good warning sign, encourages its readers to change their behavior. A call to arms of sorts for parents, grandparents, and those concerned about the current state of the education landscape in America.

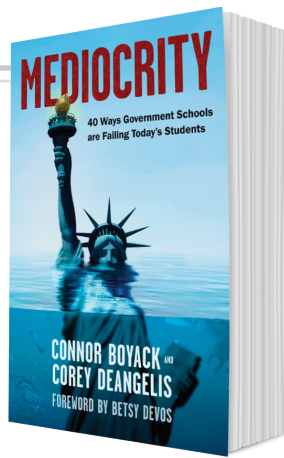
The Latin root word of education — *educere* — means to draw out, to lead out. (I previously taught 6th grade Latin.) But as Boyack and DeAngelis expertly document, this process of awakening and helping students discover themselves as they discover the world around them is

being smothered.

From declining test scores and using students as political pawns to dumbed down curriculum and students not being “college ready,” the shortcomings of America’s government schools are intentional and methodical, as Boyack and DeAngelis describe. Add on the attempts to erase parents’ role in their children’s education, or chastise them for trying to be involved — even concerning medically life-altering decisions — and the deterioration of the system takes on a whole new meaning.

“The idea of government schools being ‘too big to fail’ might seem odd since there is evidence everywhere of the institution’s consistent failure,” Boyack and DeAngelis write. “But failure looks different when it is incremental, just like the proverbial frog in the pot of steadily boiling water — it is hard to see the destruction of a system when it looks like extremely slow decay.”

Consider who contributed to the schematics of today’s government schools and what they prioritized. Not only is this factory-model system no



longer relevant for today's economy, but the fundamental intent of such a system — to strengthen a child's dependence upon the state — is at odds with the diverse views of the families it is supposed to serve, continue Boyack and DeAngelis.

Take Horace Mann and John Dewey, for example, two leading education reformers in America. Mann admired a schooling system being developed at the time in Prussia that represented an “authoritarian, top-down model that emphasized the collective over the individual.” Through his quest to industrialize education, the framework he set up — the foundations of a system — was picked up by others such as John Dewey, a secular humanist who theorized an atheist utopia. As this schooling system was being built across the country, Dewey and his like-minded reformers were able to, in Dewey's own words, “build up forces... whose natural effect is to undermine the importance and uniqueness of family life.” As Boyack and DeAngelis summarize, “Academics were secondary; social transformation was the key, and families stood in the way.”

Does this mean that all the kind, hard-working teachers at the nearby elementary school share this goal to socially engineer the rising generation? Of course not. I come from a family of public school teachers — and was one myself — who aspire to help students achieve their fullest potential. The problem, Boyack and DeAngelis point out, is that good teachers “can only do so much in a system that constrains their growth.”

Therefore, it is time to empower students, families, and teachers to pursue excellent alternative systems. The current monopoly of the government school system needs competition to rise above the mediocrity of past decades. “We have seen the lack of competition lead to complacency — schools

not evolving to teach students the skills needed for success in the current economy,” note Boyack and DeAngelis. But teachers' unions and others in the system oppose empowering families through education freedom because of the

competition it introduces. “Naturally, no monopoly wants competition; the privileged position of the status quo is defended until the institution is forced to reform by external pressure. If we want to fix the current mediocrity, we have to dismantle the monopoly.”

Perhaps most concerning is that there actually is general recognition that our country's schools are in a sad state, but the pervasiveness of the problems is often not known — or accepted. Parents may shelter themselves from confronting such realities because their local neighborhood school couldn't be part of the problem, right? It is difficult to accept new information that challenges our beliefs, Boyack and DeAngelis continue. So, there will be those who minimize or dismiss the 40 examples shared in this book and write them off as being too critical.

But there is another option for readers: heeding the warnings and taking action — “muster up the courage and commitment to pursue superior alternatives that will be a better fit for each of your children while minimizing or eliminating the negative aspects of their school experience,” Boyack and DeAngelis conclude.

“Our future as a country depends on fixing this foundational problem, and conventional approaches to improvement won't work. We will not overcome mediocrity through more teacher training, more taxpayer dollars, or more testing and technology.” The best course of action is to “stop telling kids to tread water and, instead, throw them a lifesaver.” ★

—Catrin Wigfall



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## Stay and Fight

Three reasons why this conservative is not leaving Minnesota.

**R**ecently, we have heard from a disgruntled conservative who is leaving Minnesota and a liberal bidding him “good riddance.” But there is another view: Those conservatives who are staying.

I am sad to say that Howard Root is mostly right (in his May 23 Opinion in the *Star Tribune*, “Goodbye Minnesota”). Minnesotans were some of the most heavily taxed citizens in the United States going into this last legislative session, and most of them will be even more heavily taxed coming out of it. That is some achievement for a state forecast to have a budget surplus of \$18 billion.

Minnesotans don’t get value for all this money. As Mr. Root notes, the state government is increasingly bad at fulfilling its core function of protecting the lives and property of its citizens. Indeed, Minnesota’s serious crime rate — Part 1 crimes as defined by the FBI — is now above the national average.

By contrast, the response from Avi S. Olitzky (in his May 25 Counterpoint in the *Star Tribune*, “Counterpoint: Minnesota will do nicely without hopeless critics”) was the kind of reflexive, fact-free boosterism that Sinclair Lewis skewered in *Babbitt* a century ago. He claims to “see Minnesota as a place of robust growth,” and, while he is free to claim what he likes, the fact is that our state’s economy has grown more slowly than that of the United States in every year since 2014.

The old chestnut that Minnesota’s high taxes “fund essential services and programs that contribute to the quality of life we enjoy here” got another airing despite there being no statistically significant relationship between a state’s tax burden and its ranking on something like *U.S. News & World Report*’s annual Best States Rankings. This is one of those claims progressives seem to think

becomes true by repetition.

Mr. Olitzky sees “a state full of hope and potential,” but a growing number of Minnesotans disagree with him — which is why a net 35,712 have fled the state in the last two years, most often for Ron DeSantis’ Florida. When liberals tell you that Minnesota shows that high taxes and high government spending are a social and economic elixir, ask them why, if that is that case, so many of its residents are fleeing.

Like Mr. Olitzky, I am an immigrant to Minnesota. In a nice illustration of horseshoe theory, some among the state’s “progressives” have suggested I return whence I came or, failing that, depart for Florida, at least. There are three reasons why I will not be making the journey with Mr. Root.

First, the liberal grip on Minnesota is not as tight as it seems. In 2022, the DFL’s party unit took in nearly \$24 million from

all sources, while the state Republican Party took in a paltry \$1.3 million. Even so, and with the built-in advantage of a friendly media, the DFL took the state Senate by just one seat and that by just 321 votes. The DFL is governing like a party that just scored 60 percent of the vote, not because they did, but precisely because they didn't, and they want to ram their agenda through before Minnesotans cotton on to what they're up to.

The DFL's awareness of this weakness is evident, too, in its attack on democracy by making it practically impossible for third parties to get on the ballot in Minnesota. Not a single reporter asked a single legislator a single question about this.

Second, even while its economy splutters, crime rises, test scores fall, the lights go out, and residents flee in numbers not seen in at least three decades, Minnesota's government is being lauded as an example by progressives around the country. *NBC News*, the *Daily Beast*, and the *New York Times* have all run pieces lately praising the state government and Gov. Walz in particular. It matters to the entire country that the sad truth about Minnesota gets out.

Finally, and most importantly, Minnesota is still a wonderful place to live. Its scenery is beautiful, its weather varied (or challenging, depending on your view), and its people decent, none of which, of course, depends on high taxes. When you have something good it is worth fighting for even when you feel the odds are against you. Perhaps especially then.

On May 26, former Pres. Barack Obama tweeted, "If you need a reminder that elections have consequences, check out what's happening in Minnesota." He is exactly right. Our state is about to move from the "fool around" to the "find out" stage of voting for ever higher taxes, ever higher government spending, and ever bigger government. Minnesota needs its conservatives now more than ever. ★

—John Phelan

*This column originally appeared in Alpha News on June 3, 2023.*



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## Big Government



Smith Foundry Company in Minneapolis is one of the existing facilities that would not be allowed to expand under the city's new zoning rules.

## The Road to Good Intentions...

Minneapolis votes to restrict heavy industries, inevitably hurting those they're claiming to help.

On May 25, 2023, the Minneapolis City Council unanimously voted to ban new heavy industries and limit the expansion of existing facilities in the city via an update to city zoning codes because of environmental concerns. Newly-banned industries include new scrap metal industries, chemical manufacturers, commercial laundries, combustion-powered energy facilities, and foundries, accord-

ing to a report by the *Sahan Journal*.

Unfortunately, this means Minneapolis will also be banning the jobs and economic opportunities that come with these industries even though air monitoring data from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) show the air quality in Minneapolis is good, and pollution levels are far below levels that the EPA considers hazardous.

The city's well-intended ordinance will result in the loss of economic opportunity and harm the low-income communities they purportedly try to protect.

### Smith Foundry tour

On Wednesday, May 31, I was invited to visit the Smith Foundry, one of the existing facilities that would not be allowed to expand under the new zoning rules.

This foundry has been located in South

The city's well-intended ordinance **will result in the loss of economic opportunity and harm the low-income communities they purportedly try to protect.**

Minneapolis since 1923, where it manufactured iron castings for pot belly stoves used in one-room schoolhouses and town halls. Today, the foundry produces metal parts for over 300 customers, including water purification and tractor-building companies.

The foundry employs 65 people. Approximately 53 are full-time union employees and 12 are temporary employees hired on an attempt-to-hire basis. After 60 days, temporary employees can become part of the Teamsters Union. Many of the employees I saw on my visit were from diverse backgrounds.

Starting salaries at the foundry start at \$18.50 per hour and go up to \$21 per hour, and employees have excellent health insurance benefits under the Teamsters. Employees work 10-hour days; with overtime they can earn between \$60,000 and \$70,000 per year.

The Smith Foundry is also a Second

Chance Employer, meaning they hire people with criminal records if they are willing to work.

Many of the foundry workers live in the neighborhood where the foundry is located — even close enough to be able to walk to work each day. Isn't this exactly the kind of employer that the members of the City Council say they want for the future of the city?

### Living in fantasy land

According to the *Star Tribune*, the City Council appears to understand that these facilities create jobs, but not the kind the city wants, *stating*, “The analysis noted that manufacturing districts create jobs and recommended that the city reserve industrial land for facilities that produce minimal pollution impacts and pay a living wage, which are less likely to face community opposition.”

The problem with this idea is that in reality, it won't happen.

For example, the city has wanted to repurpose the old “Roof Depot” site — a project on which it has already spent \$16.7 million — in addition to building a new water yard to expand its public works campus in the neighborhood. However, the same groups who applauded the city council's vote ban-

ning new industrial facilities opposed the expansion of the City's waterworks facilities because of the “environmental impact.”

Instead, these groups have proposed an eight-acre urban farm in the area. The urban farm would use aquaponics to grow fish and plants in a system that doesn't need soil. The Bureau of Labor Statistics does not have wage data for urban farmers in Minneapolis, but it is doubtful that the urban farm will generate \$3.9 million in wages as the Smith Foundry does.

### A solution in search of a problem

While members of the City Council voted to ban new industrial facilities nor allow existing facilities to expand based on environmental grounds, real-life air monitoring data from the EPA show the ordinance was completely unjustified.

EPA data from the Andersen School air monitoring station, an air monitoring station less than a mile away from the Smith Foundry, show zero days in 2022 where levels of particulate matter measuring 2.5 microns in diameter, known as PM2.5, exceeded EPA's 24-hour limit of 35 micrograms per cubic meter (ug/m3) on these particles.

Additionally, the annual average

concentration of PM2.5 at this monitoring station was 7.5 ug/m3, which is far better than the EPA's current standard of 12 ug/m3, and it is even better than the proposed revision of EPA's standard to 9 ug/m3.

EPA establishes air quality standards designed to protect public health, with an adequate margin of safety. This means there is no scientific basis for the City Council's claims that air quality in the area is bad and that these new zoning regulations are justified.

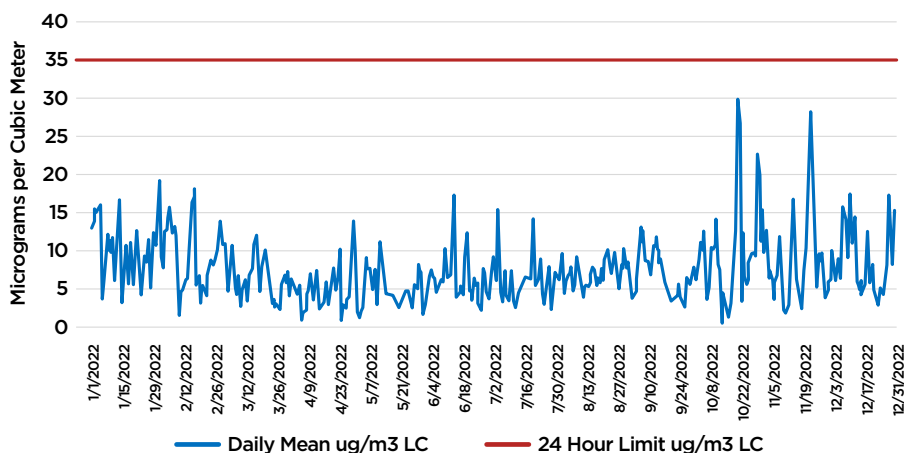
While members of the City Council voted to ban new industrial facilities nor allow existing facilities to expand based on environmental grounds, **real-life air monitoring data from the EPA show the ordinance was completely unjustified.**

Furthermore, data from the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency show that Minnesota's air quality meets all of the federal standards for criteria pollutants, and days of lower air quality were caused by wildfire smoke being transported to Minnesota, not the industrial facilities Minneapolis is regulating out of business.

The City of Minneapolis is making a huge mistake by banning new industrial facilities and prohibiting existing facilities from expanding within city limits. Doing so will harm low-income neighborhoods by preventing new job opportunities from coming to the area, and the rules will not meaningfully improve air quality because it *already* meets the EPA's standards. ★

—Isaac Orr

South Minneapolis EPA Air Quality Monitoring Data in 2022



Source: U.S. EPA Monitoring Site 270530963





## Bigger *and* Better

Growing the economy is the best way to end poverty.

**O**n June 13, Minnesota Public Radio (MPR) asked if Minnesota betting on the child tax credit to cut poverty would work. Answering that question requires looking at what happened in the last several years.

At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, low-income Americans saw massive job losses. In response, the U.S. government dumped trillions of dollars into the economy, some directly to households through stimulus checks, expanded child tax credit payments, and expanded unemployment benefits. So, despite these job losses, after accounting for government assistance, poverty fell.

However, this came at a tremendous cost. For one, to afford all this spending, Congress passed three stimulus bills, all totaling about \$5 trillion. All this mas-

sive spending (plus other factors) has significantly raised inflation consequently inflicting pain on American households that we are still experiencing.

Additionally, despite this massive spending, poverty did not fall to zero. In fact, any poverty reduction was temporary. Ending COVID-19 assistance programs ended the progress the country made in reducing poverty. This is because these payments, like existing welfare programs, were not necessarily intended to get people out (and stay out) of poverty. They existed only to help the poor afford necessities while they faced a difficult time.

Minnesota's child tax credit, much like payments made during the pandemic, comes at a very high cost to taxpayers and Minnesota's economy. While it

might reduce poverty, any progress made would likely only be temporary without continuous spending.

That is why, to get people efficiently and sustainably out of poverty, the state government should focus on growing the economy rather than increasing spending. A growing economy creates more jobs, giving people the opportunity to earn income and climb up the economic ladder. This lessens the pressure on the state government as fewer people rely on welfare programs and, at the same time, increases tax revenues.

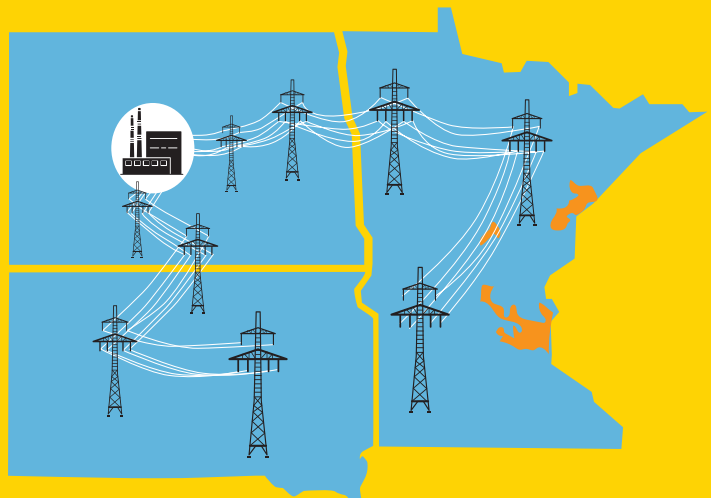
Consider what happened in the last three years before the COVID-19 pandemic. According to data from the Federal Reserve Board's Survey of Consumer Finances, between 2016 and 2019, median incomes grew five percent as the economy grew at 2.5 percent per year, on average. During the same period, unemployment fell. The result? Poverty fell to record lows without the government spending trillions of dollars on assistance programs and payments.

For the whole nation, for instance, poverty fell to 10.5 percent in 2019 — the lowest estimate since the U.S. Census Bureau started tracking poverty in 1959. Compared to the U.S., Minnesota has a lower official poverty rate. And in 2019, that rate fell even further, reaching 5.7 percent, down from 7.9 percent in 2018. The same was true for child poverty. For the United States and Minnesota, official child poverty rates reached historic lows in 2019 at 14.4 percent and 7.1 percent, respectively.

If Gov. Tim Walz and the DFL are serious about ending poverty — helping people get out and stay out of poverty — they need to support and advocate for policies that grow the economy. Sadly, a lot of the policies enacted in the 2023 legislative session are likely to harm Minnesota's economy rather than help it grow. ★

—Martha Njolomole

# Did You Know...



■ = North Dakota Transmission Area

■ = Other Energy Source Area

## North Dakota coal economically impacts the Upper Midwest?

Generates **\$5.7 billion**  
in economic activity



Provides over **14,000**  
direct and indirect jobs



Provides power to over  
**2 million**  
homes and small businesses



**24/7/365**  
fuel supply

reliable  
dispatchable

More facts on the LOWEST COST energy source at:

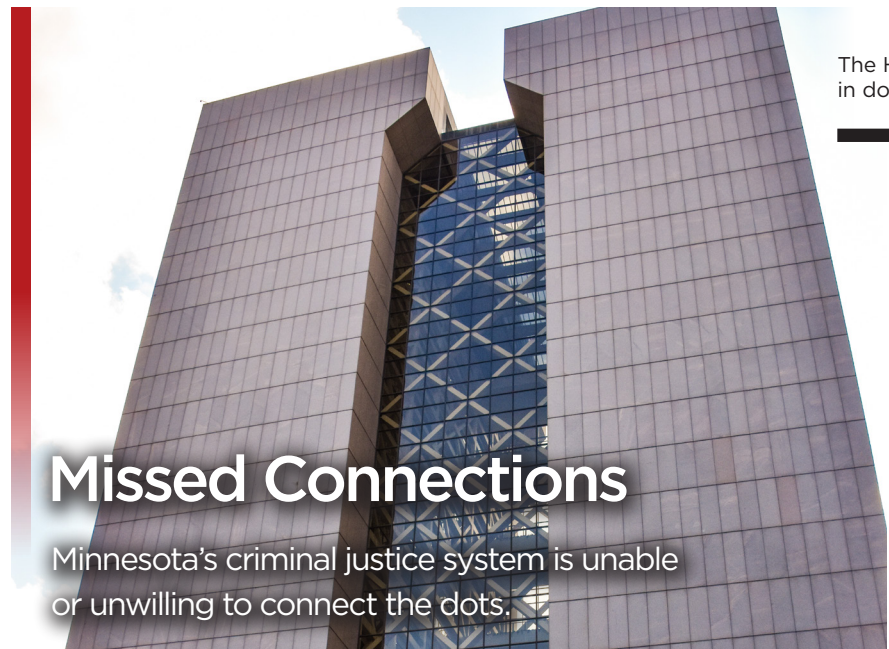


[www.SecureEnergyFuture.org](http://www.SecureEnergyFuture.org)





## Public Safety



The Hennepin County Government Center in downtown Minneapolis.

### Missed Connections

Minnesota's criminal justice system is unable or unwilling to connect the dots.

Ritu Manoj Jethani / Shutterstock.com

**D**aquan Stephen Rogers, 29, is under investigation for an assault on a light rail platform in downtown Minneapolis on May 20 that resulted in a 41-year-old falling under a passing train and being crushed to death. The video of the incident is troubling to watch but underscores Rogers' disregard for the safety of others.

Rogers was arrested for probable cause murder later in the day, but the Hennepin County Attorney's Office deferred charging Rogers pending further investigation. He was released on May 24 with no conditions and no charges.

If this was the only incident Rogers had ever been involved in, we might all accept the need for patience while investigators gathered all the information needed for the County Attorney to make a charging decision. But this is far from Rogers' first brush with the law, and many of them have involved violence in and around our transit system.

The failure of our court system to connect the dots and incapacitate Rogers, and so many others just like him, is making us all less safe. It leaves a multi-billion-dollar light rail and public transit system strug-

gling, and on a broader scale, the "livability" of our urban areas has been severely impacted.

Rogers has had at least 13 criminal court cases in the metro area over the past 10 years, many involving assaults, disorderly conduct, or weapons violations — many involving the transit system. In nearly every case in which Rogers was ordered to appear in court, he failed to appear as ordered, and arrest warrants were required to compel his appearance. There are well over 20 instances of failure to appear and nearly as many arrest warrants. Yet court after court continues to release Rogers when he comes before them.

The latest failure to appear occurred June 1 in Hennepin County District Court. I was there to see if Rogers would appear on a case from April, in which he was arrested by transit police for disorderly conduct, fleeing police on foot, and possession of drug paraphernalia. Rogers had been booked, charged, and released with no bail and no conditions other than to appear back in court June 1. Instead, Rogers continued to remain lawless, and on May 20 his violent nature cost a man his life.

What I was hoping to see, given Rogers' prolific history of failing to appear and the rather high-profile arrest for murder at the light rail station, was a court system fully aware of this information and a court system willing and able to connect the dots and take action to incapacitate Rogers in the name of public safety. My hopes were dashed.

What I witnessed was two prosecutors and a judge processing or disposing of some 30 cases in approximately two hours. At the end of that time, the court asked the clerk which defendants had failed to show. There were several, including Rogers. They then quickly addressed those failures to appear. When Rogers' case came up, there was no recognition of his history of failing to appear and no recognition of his involvement in the homicide just 10 days earlier. Instead, the prosecutor noted that Rogers' failure to appear was the first in the case from April, and therefore recommended a "sign and release" warrant, which is Minneapolis City Attorney policy. The result of a sign and release warrant is that when the police come in contact with Rogers, they cannot arrest him but rather must inform him that he missed court and issue him a new date. (Sign and Release warrants were created in the late 2010s as a way to reduce jail bookings — specifically targeting the reduction of arrests of people of color who were determined to be disproportionately affected by "failure to appear" warrants).

I spoke with the prosecutor after court. He acknowledged having no information about Rogers' history of failure to appear, or his involvement in the recent homicide. I also spoke with the court's clerk. It was clear that no information about Rogers' history was known to the court when the decision to issue a sign and release warrant was made.

I've also reviewed the online court records for Rogers' 13 previous cases. They include assaulting police officers, assault of a transit bus driver while armed with a realist-looking pellet gun, disorderly conduct, fleeing police, and drug possession. Each of Rogers' convictions has resulted in a "stayed" sentence and a credit for any jail time. Not one of the courts that have previously "stayed" a sentence on Rogers has taken any action against him for his ongoing criminal activity. In fact, when Rogers was last in custody for the May homicide, he had failed to pay hundreds of dollars in fines or make any effort to pay \$1,100 in restitution to victims in his previous cases. Yet no alert appears to have been made to any of the previous courts that continue to have jurisdiction over Rogers.

As of this writing, there is a toothless "sign and release" warrant for Rogers, though his whereabouts are unknown. The Minneapolis police continue their follow-up investigation in hopes the Hennepin County Attorney will eventually charge Rogers for his involvement in the light rail train death. Several other courts that continue to have jurisdiction over Rogers for previous convictions are apparently oblivious to his continued criminal activity and are taking no action against him.

In a truly head-shaking turn of events, the recent marijuana legalization law will result in the automatic expungement of one of Rogers' earlier convictions — the same system that will keep failing to connect the dots between Rogers' other criminal activity and that of thousands of others like him.

Over the next several years, we will pour hundreds of millions of dollars into the legalization of marijuana and the expungement of previous convictions while continuing to underfund an overburdened system of judges, prosecutors, and associated technology that could help them connect dots in cases like Rogers'. As a result, our criminal justice system will continue to fail to keep us safe. The public rightfully expects more, and the criminal justice system must find ways to do better. ★

—David Zimmer

## Prisons

# Changing Course

DOC settlement with transgender inmate risks the safety of female inmates.

**T**he Minnesota Department of Corrections (DOC) has moved transgender inmate Christina (formerly Craig) Lusk, 57, from the Moose Lake men's prison to the all-female Minnesota Correctional Facility in Shakopee. Female-identifying Lusk and the DOC reached a settlement after Lusk sued the agency for discrimination and unconstitutional treatment in June 2022. Now, Lusk is the first transgender inmate in Minnesota to be moved to a correctional facility based on gender identity rather than biological sex.

Lusk first identified as transgender in 2008, began medically transitioning in 2009 and has gone by the legal name Christina Suzanne Lusk since 2018. Lusk was incarcerated at the Moose Lake men's facility, as recommended by the DOC's Transgender Committee, in 2019 for 1st Degree Possession of 50 grams or more of methamphetamine. In Lusk's complaint, the DOC "placed Ms. Lusk with men subjecting her to discrimination and harassment," "refused to acknowledge her legal name," and "arbitrarily deferred Ms. Lusk's gender-affirming surgery."

According to the Civil Cover Sheet from the lawsuit, the DOC violated the Minnesota Human Rights Act and Minnesota Constitution. The Minnesota Human Rights Act states that it is unfair to "discriminate against any person in the access to, admission to, full utilization of or benefit from any public service" and to engage in reprisal against an individual on the basis of sex and sexual orientation.

In the complaint, Lusk alleged that the DOC violated the Minnesota Constitu-

tion in depriving Lusk of equal protection, using cruel and unusual punishment, and violating Lusk's "right to bodily integrity and autonomy protected by the due process guarantees." The complaint also states that, in placing Lusk with male inmates, the DOC fails to meet the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA), which "creates standards and protocols to prevent the sexual assault and victimization of people in custody. PREA identifies transgender people as a group that is at risk of sexual victimization."

Lusk's move to the women's facility is under the guise of protecting the vulnerable, but it sets a precedent blatantly

Lusk's move...sets a precedent blatantly disregarding the rights of vulnerable incarcerated women in Minnesota.

disregarding the rights of vulnerable incarcerated women in Minnesota. While Lusk will receive \$495,000 and gender-affirming care from the DOC as part of the settlement, more than 560 biological women at Shakopee's correctional facility are now forced to live with a biological man. According to the DOC, Lusk is only one of 48 transgender-identifying inmates in Minnesota, meaning many more incarcerated biological women could soon be in danger of sexual assault and victimization, in opposition to the intentions of PREA. By agreeing to settle with Lusk, the DOC honored the wishes of one person identifying as a woman but now risks the safety of countless more biological women going forward. ★

—Adriana Isabella is a student at Hillsdale College and a current summer intern at American Experiment.





## No Excuses Now

DFL legislators pushed through ‘historic investments’ in education, so the system is bound to improve, right?

**M**ajor changes are coming to K-12 education in the state, and most of them aren’t good. Minnesota Democrats took full advantage of their trifecta and passed an education omnibus bill that imposes burdensome mandates and contentious policies on school districts and charter schools statewide.

With a historic education spending budget of \$23.2 billion over the next two years (about a third of the total state budget), we will see if these dollars can do what previous funding increases haven’t done before to boost student achievement. No excuses for not being “fully funded,” or that schools need this or that to help students start growing academically. DFL legislators were in full control, so we will finally see our public school system improve, right?

Forgive the skepticism, it’s just that two years ago the legislature passed what was then the largest increase to the K-12

education funding formula in 15 years. But not even a year after the historic spending hike of half a billion dollars, Minnesota’s schools were apparently on the brink of collapse.

Now, with \$2.26 billion in new funding for schools — but no accountability for academic achievement — there is concern that the new dollars are attached to too many new mandates, including unfunded ones, that will drain school budgets, leave school districts treading water financially, and students still without the skills they need to be informed and engaged members of society.

### **Ethnic studies for all schools**

American Experiment has written much on efforts to shift our education system from its traditional focus on excellence and pragmatic instruction to an ideological mission focused on reshaping students’ attitudes and beliefs to advance

a political agenda.

The latest vehicle for this is critical social justice ideology, which is laced strategically through ethnic studies. Unlike the importance of elevating the cultures, backgrounds, and contributions of all the people who have shaped our great state and country, this version of ethnic studies will inject reductive, racialized thinking into every Minnesota public classroom under innocuous terms.

High schools will have to offer an ethnic studies course by the 2026-27 school year, and elementary and middle schools will have to offer the course by the 2027-28 school year. Ethnic studies is to be embedded into *all* academic standards. Students must be allowed to take a course on this topic to satisfy their social studies requirement and can use the course to fulfill a language arts, arts, math, or science credit if the course meets the applicable standards.

The bill defines ethnic studies in this ideologically-loaded way:

*“Ethnic studies” means the interdisciplinary study of race, ethnicity, and indigeneity with a focus on the experiences and perspectives of people of color within and beyond the United States. Ethnic studies analyzes the ways in which race and racism have been and continue to be social, cultural, and political forces, and the connection of race to the stratification of other groups, including stratification based on the protected classes.*

The Minnesota Department of Education will have to create an Ethnic Studies Working Group to advise the commissioner of education on an ethnic studies framework. The Minnesota Ethnic Studies Coalition — a tactical arm of the activist organization Education for Liberation Minnesota — will provide input on who the commissioner should appoint to serve in this group.

### ‘Antiracist’ curriculum

Minnesota school boards are tasked with adopting a comprehensive, long-term strategic plan to support and improve teaching and learning. With that comes selecting curriculum that will have to be “rigorous, accurate, antiracist, and culturally sustaining.”

What constitutes “accurate” is not defined. (Consider, for example, school districts that use The 1619 Project curriculum despite many historians calling into question its accuracy.)

“Antiracist” is defined as “actively working to identify and eliminate racism in all forms in order to change policies, behaviors, and beliefs that perpetuate racist ideas and actions.” “Culturally sustaining” is defined as “integrating content and practices that infuse the culture and language of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color communities who have been and con-

tinue to be harmed and erased through the education system.”

School boards will also have to plan out how to address “institutional racism,” which is defined as “structures, policies, and practices within and across institutions that produce outcomes that disadvantage those who are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color.” The education omnibus bill language links racial disparities to racism.

### Reading literacy

The biggest win for students in this bill is the requirement for school districts, teachers, and teacher preparation programs to use evidence-based reading instruction strategies.

Over 52 percent of Minnesota’s 3rd graders can’t read at grade level as measured by the state’s Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment, and 4th grade reading scores on national assessments are the lowest they have been in 30 years and below the national average.

While many sounded the alarm long ago on Minnesota’s struggle to help a number of students become literate, this statewide overhaul of literacy education to ensure that educators are teaching reading using effective strategies is encouraging.

“Evidence-based” instructional strategies must focus on phonological and phonemic awareness, phonics and decoding, spelling, fluency, vocabulary, oral language, and comprehension. The bill’s language specifically states that the three-cueing system, an ineffective reading instruction strategy that teaches students to use visual cues when attempting to read an unknown word, is not evidence-based instruction.

What will Minnesota students — and their families — get for the hefty price tag on their education? DFL legislators have said this education bill is “transformational.” I fear it is so, just in mostly the wrong ways. ★

—Catrin Wigfall



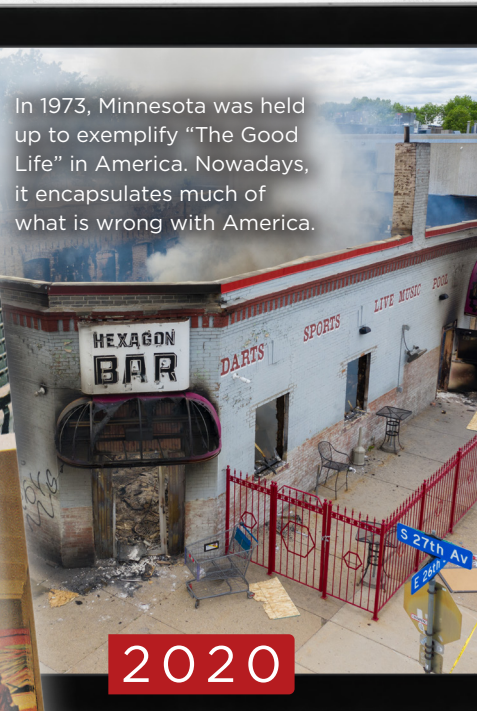
American  
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.org







In 1973, Minnesota was held up to exemplify "The Good Life" in America. Nowadays, it encapsulates much of what is wrong with America.



HISTORY REVISITED

# STATE OF OUR STATE

50 years after its *TIME* cover story, does Minnesota still work?

By John Phelan





In the morning of Monday, August 13, 1973, *TIME* magazine hit newsstands across the United States. Cultural figures like Marlon Brando and Norman Mailer and statesmen such as Richard Nixon and Leonid Brezhnev had recently graced the magazine's cover, but this week it featured a man in a plaid shirt standing in a boat in the middle of a lake holding up a fish. That man was Wendell Anderson, governor of Minnesota, and the headline ran: "The Good Life in Minnesota." Turning to page 24, readers found Lance Morrow's cover story: "Minnesota: A State That Works."

Fifty years on from that famous cover story, Minnesota is once again being held up as an example for the nation, but for very different reasons.

### The Good Life

The year 1973 was a turbulent time in America. The social turmoil of the 1960s continued unabated, and the economy was weakening. America's involvement in Vietnam was ending in the

country's first defeat. The Supreme Court overturned state bans on abortion in its *Roe v. Wade* decision, sparking the "Culture Wars." The Watergate scandal was beginning to consume the Nixon presidency and in October, facing charges of tax evasion, Vice President Spiro Agnew resigned.

Judging by the movies they went to see, Americans were looking to escape this reality. The top 10 movies released that year included three nostalgia pieces: "The Sting," "American Graffiti," and "The Way We Were." Another slice of nostalgia, *The Waltons*, jumped from 19th to 2nd in the ratings behind *All in the Family* whose lead, Archie Bunker, encapsulated a growing feeling that things were getting worse.

But in his *TIME* article, Morrow argued that Americans looking for The Good Life in 1973 didn't need to go to the movie theater or Jefferson County, Va., they just had to go to Minnesota.

"On an August Saturday afternoon, the scene is a slice of America's Norman Rockwell past," he began.

*Barefoot children play one old cat and race their wagons down gently sloping sidewalks. Under the overhanging oaks, their fathers labor with hand mowers and rakes. On one lawn up the street, a rummage sale is in progress. Station wagons, laden with children, groceries, dogs and camping equipment, and trailing boats, slide out of driveways, heading north for a week or two at the lake.*

*It could as well be Little Rock, Ark., or Great Bar-*

**But in his *TIME* article, Morrow argued that Americans looking for The Good Life in 1973 didn't need to go to the movie theater or Jefferson County, Va., they just had to go to Minnesota.**

*ington, Mass., or Portland, Ore.,... But the setting is the north side of Minneapolis, in Minnesota, a state where the Rockwell vision pertains with a special consistency. If the American good life has anywhere survived in some intelligent equilibrium, it may be in Minnesota.*

Morrow painted a seductive portrait of life in our state, where the "residual American secret still seems to operate. Some of the nation's more agreeable qualities are evident there: courtesy and fairness, honesty, a capacity for innovation, hard work, intellectual adventure and responsibility."

Minnesota combined urban amenities and rural idyll. "As downtown Minneapolis was deteriorating in the 1950s," Morrow wrote,

*the Daytons elected to keep their huge department store there rather than move it to the suburbs. Cooperating with the city, they turned Nicollet Avenue into a shopping mall and built a system of skyways linking the buildings along the street. The project, spearheaded by Donald C. Dayton, 58, has stimulated more than \$200 million in new downtown construction, reversing the familiar urban pattern of decay and turning the area into a bright and active commercial district. The new 51-story IDS tower, designed by Philip Johnson, is the tallest and most distinguished building between Chicago and San Francisco.*

*Should you want a change of scenery, "Nature is close," Morrow noted, "20 minutes from a downtown Minneapolis office building to a country lake."*

Minnesota's people were its great resource. "The citizens are well educated," Morrow reported, "the high school dropout rate, 7.6%,

is the nation's lowest."

They were *decent*, too. "Minnesotans are remarkably civil; their crime rate is the third lowest in the nation (after Iowa and Maine)," Morrow continued. He interviewed Arleen Kulis, who moved to Minnesota from Chicago: "At first, she did not like it: the winters were formidable; the people seemed a bit provincial. But then she began savoring the lack of traffic, the safety of the streets..." "No one ever bothers you on the streets," Ms. Kulis told him. "You listen to the news in the morning, and there aren't 20 million murders." Another interviewee, Jim Johnson, a former Princeton instructor who had recently returned to Minnesota, said: "You just don't have people barking at you when you're walking down the street or sitting in a restaurant."

Minnesotans were as decent in the corridors of power as they were in the streets of downtown Minneapolis. "Politics is almost unnaturally clean," Morrow wrote. "No patronage, virtually no corruption."

Together, land and people were the foundation for a strong economy. "The state harbors some of the nation's fastest-growing computer companies," Morrow noted, "Honeywell Inc.,

Justin Berken / Shutterstock.com



Control Data Corp., Univac — along with a diversity of such other corporations as 3M Co., General Mills Inc., Geo. A. Hormel & Co., Pillsbury Co., and Investors Diversified Services Inc., one of the world's largest mutual fund conglomerates." This was one reason why "Minnesota has been attracting new population, notably from the neighboring Dakotas."

There had been race riots in Minneapolis in the late 1960s, but now "...blacks are often among the state's more enthusiastic boosters." Gleason Glover, executive director of the Minneapolis Urban League, told Morrow:

*For a black, Minneapolis is one of the truly outstanding cities in the U.S. to live in. The problems here — housing, education, discrimination, unemployment — are manageable... There just isn't the real, deep-seated hatred here that blacks often encounter in other cities.*

To round out the appeal, "the Twins, the North Stars and the Vikings have brought a state of natural participant sportsmen into the big leagues." Indeed, Bud Grant's Vikings were on the cusp of a season that would take them to the Super Bowl for the first of three visits in four seasons.

Another of Morrow's interviewees was Chuck Ruhr, the 36-year-old owner of a Minneapolis ad agency and resident of White Bear Lake. "There is a little less of the bad things here," Ruhr told him, "drugs, pollution. Being way up here, people have had a chance to see the crest of the wave coming and react to it. There's an attitude, too, that we've got a nice little thing and let's keep it that way."

## Fifty years on

Fifty years on, America is again going through turbulent times. But nobody, now, would offer Minnesota as an escape from America's troubles. Indeed, nowadays, it frequently encapsulates them.

Minnesota can no longer point to a strong economy as a magnet for "attracting new population." In each

year since 2014, Minnesota's economy grew more slowly than that of the United States generally, and it is one of just 13 states that has not yet regained its peak of pre-COVID-19 employment. The corporate computing stars of 1973 are no more: Control Data Corp. and Univac no longer exist and Honeywell is now headquartered in North Carolina. Minnesota had 16 companies on the Fortune 500 list in 2022, but this was a legacy of the state that Morrow eulogized: Eight of these companies had been on the Fortune 500 in 2000 and another six had been on that year's longer Fortune 1,000 list.

Indeed, our state is now *losing* record numbers of residents to other parts of

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**Fifty years on, America is again going through turbulent times. But nobody, now, would offer Minnesota as an escape from America's troubles. Indeed, nowadays, it frequently encapsulates them.**

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America: a net 16,312 in 2021, the most since 1991, a record that stood for just one year until 19,400 fled in 2022. In 2020-2021, Minnesota lost residents, on net, in every single age category and in every income group above \$25k to \$50k annually. More headed to Florida than any other state.

Minnesotans are no longer as "well educated" as they were. The 2023 *U.S. News & World Report* "Best States Rankings" ranked our preK-12 22nd,



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down from 8th as recently as 2017. Over the same period, our state dropped from 6th for reading scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) to 18th and from 3rd to 8th for math. Minnesota's students of color are particularly badly affected. Mississippi's Hispanic 8th graders outperformed Minnesota's Hispanic 8th graders in both reading and math, and Mississippi's black 8th graders outperformed Minnesota's black 8th graders in reading. The public schools' shift in focus from education to indoctrination has hurt students of color most.

Figures like these are often blamed on the COVID-19 pandemic, though that just raises the question why it had such terrible impacts in Minnesota compared to other states. But the pandemic and the riots following the death of George Floyd didn't so much start new trends as accelerate trends that were already underway.

With crime, for example, it is true that the 96 homicides Minneapolis saw in 2021 were the most since 1995 and that St. Paul set a new record with 40 in 2022. But the *Star Tribune* reported in September 2019 that robberies in downtown Minneapolis were up 54 percent compared with the same period in 2018 and that "the number of shootings in the surrounding First Precinct are up 22% from last year." Minnesotans are not so "remarkably civil" as they were — indeed, Minnesota's serious crime rate is now higher than the national average — but they have been getting that way for a while.

Few would now call downtown Minneapolis a "bright and active commercial district." Businesses are fleeing — CBRE, Portico Benefit Services, and AT&T all in the space of just three weeks earlier this year — and there are now over 21.2 million square feet of vacant office space in the Twin Cities metro, with office vacancy rates up 12 percent year over year. Dayton's department store closed in 2017 and the owners of the IDS Center, the gleaming wonder of 1973, can no longer pay the mortgage.

Individuals are avoiding





**The pandemic and the riots following the death of George Floyd didn't so much start new trends as accelerate trends that were already underway.**

pre-pandemic activity, only slightly better than Chicago and Detroit, and the city cracked a list of the top 10 nationwide that homebuyers want to flee.

Neither is nature as close as it was. Between 1982 and 2014, the amount of time the average driver spent stuck in traffic in the Twin Cities quadrupled, from 12 hours to 47 hours, and the metro went from being the 35th most congested urban area in the United States to 21st.

Neither would anyone seriously say that our “politics is almost unnaturally clean” anymore. In 2022, the Feeding Our Future scandal broke. This was the largest fraud in the United States stemming from payments made during the COVID-19 pandemic, involving \$445 million in federal money received by two networks of Minnesota nonprofits to provide free meals to children, much of which has never been accounted for and more than \$250 million of which was stolen. A number of those indicted made donations to DFL candidates, including Attorney General Keith Ellison.

And if Minnesotans are less decent in the streets of Minneapolis, they are also less decent in the corridors of power. During the last legislative session, the House DFL blacklisted a journalist for asking a question, a state rep accosted another on the floor, and a nominating convention in Minneapolis erupted into violence.

Most depressing of all, perhaps, race relations are, we are told, worse in 2023 than they were in 1973. In a stark shift

from Gleason Glover’s glowing tribute to Minneapolis, Professor Samuel Myers, Jr. of the University of Minnesota recently wrote that:

*Minnesota is also putatively one of the worst places for blacks to live. Measured by racial gaps in unemployment rates, wage and salary incomes, incarceration rates, arrest rates, home ownership rates, mortgage lending rates, test scores, reported child maltreatment rates, school disciplinary and suspension rates, and even drowning rates, African Americans are worse off in Minnesota than they are in virtually every other state in the nation.*

So bad, apparently, is the lot of Minnesota’s black residents that there is a name for it: “The Minnesota Paradox.”

Even those sports teams are no longer what they were. The Vikings haven’t made a Super Bowl since 1976 and the North Stars now play in Dallas.

Earlier this year, Fox 9 tracked down Chuck Ruhr to Scottsdale, Ariz. “At that time, in relation to the rest of the country, Minnesota was pretty atypical. Now compared to the rest of the country Minnesota is pretty typical, unfortunately,” he told reporters. “The average has come up, or we moved down.”

### **The Good Life, 2023**

Even so, Minnesota is, once again, being held up as “The State That Works,” where The Good Life can be found.

In April, the *New York Times* reported on “a string of policy moves to the left after Democrats took full control of the Statehouse after nine years of divided government.” The same month, NBC News wrote that Minnesota is “attracting attention as a laboratory for how to effectively use that power to achieve progressive policy priorities.”

What priorities? NBC hailed “protecting abortion rights, legalizing recreational marijuana and restricting gun access — and they have signaled their plans to take on issues like expanding paid family leave and providing legal refuge to trans youths whose access to gender-affirming and other medical care has been restricted elsewhere.” When The Daily Beast celebrated “a wide range of progressive reforms” in Minnesota, it added “a bill

making 55,000 felons eligible to vote” and “a measure allowing undocumented immigrants to obtain a driver’s license.”

When Lance Morrow described The State That Works in 1973, that claim rested on a thriving urban center, strong economy, low crime, clean politics, exceptional education, and winning sports franchises. In 2023, Minnesota can offer none of that, and the legislative “tri-

**The State That Works claim in 1973 rested on a thriving urban center, strong economy, low crime, clean politics, exceptional education, and winning sports franchises. In 2023, Minnesota can offer none of that, and the legislative “triumphs” heralded by the national media will do nothing to improve any of those.**

umphs” heralded by the national media will do nothing to improve any of those.

Last year, Morrow returned to The State That Worked, in print at least, concluding a column for *The Wall Street Journal* noting that:

*The difference between my 1973 story and the news reports of 2022 amounts to the difference...between Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn. Tom gives you the boyish, innocent, sun-shot rendering of Hannibal, Mo.,...Huck’s story is the version of America that includes poverty, murder, alcoholism, child abuse, race prejudice, blood feud and imbecility.*

These evils were present in America in 1973, but, then, Minnesota was a refuge from them. In 2023, it is Minnesotans who are seeking refuge elsewhere. ★



A yellow tractor is shown from a low angle, with its bucket overflowing with stacks of US dollar bills. The tractor is positioned on the left side of the frame, and the cash is piled high, spilling out of the bucket and onto the ground. The background is a bright blue sky with scattered white clouds. The overall scene suggests a large-scale financial operation or a metaphorical representation of spending.

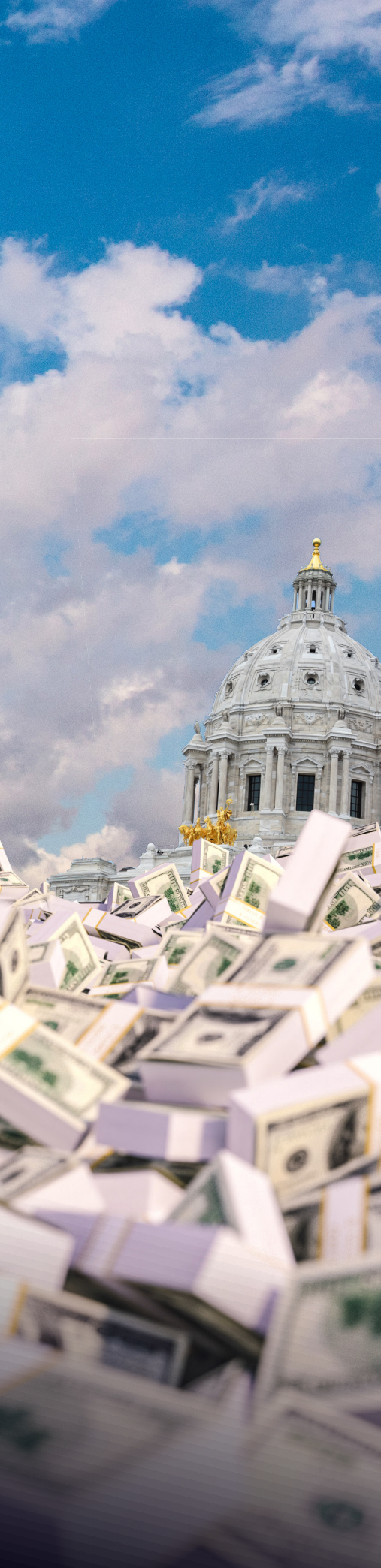
≡ LEGISLATIVE SESSION

# SPENDING AND STAMPEDING

The 2023 legislative session was  
a study of pushing through an  
ideological agenda.

By  
American Experiment  
Policy Fellows





**W**ith the 2023 Minnesota legislative session in the history books, Gov. Tim Walz worked with Democratic majorities in the House and Senate to accomplish everything on their wish list. We won't have to wait very long to judge whether the decisions they made will have a positive or negative impact on the future of the state. Metrics like population migration, state GDP growth, unemployment, consumer energy prices, student achievement, and crime rates will give us a good indication of where the state is headed. The most obvious test of the tax and budget decisions of this session will be the next few state budget forecasts. Can the Minnesota economy survive what just happened or will we whiplash from a \$17.6 billion surplus to a deficit?

### They came, they spent, they taxed, they spent some more

At first, legislative Democrats and Walz stuck to the budget targets they released on March 21, 2023. But as the session wore on, their appetite for spending grew, and new revenue streams were identified. Taxes on income, sales, businesses, cars, boats, marijuana, and delivery fees were not enough to cover the spending. So, at the last minute, a gas tax increase (indexed to inflation) was added, with most of the money dedicated to transit. Transit! Even in the face of a changing workforce after the pandemic, Democrats in Minnesota are stubbornly shoving money down the rathole of light rail, heavy rail (to Duluth!), and bus rapid transit.

Total tax increases for the next four years are over \$8 billion. The two-year state budget is growing from \$52 billion to \$69 billion, a 32.7 percent increase. The surplus was roughly divided between one-time spending (\$12 billion) and ongoing spending that will require ongoing revenue (\$5 billion). The one-time money went for big-ticket items like paid family leave, housing, bonding, tax rebates, free college tuition and

broadband. It also padded the budgets of every state agency for the 2024-25 biennium.

The "largest tax cut in history" you read about in the paper is nothing more than a redistribution of wealth. Most of the relief provided will go to families that had no state tax liability to begin with. The Walz checks shrunk from \$1,000 during the 2022 campaign to \$260 per person in the tax bill, and the child tax credits phase out after only \$37,500 of income for families. Fewer seniors will have to pay state taxes on their Social Security income, but it doesn't come close to the promise of full repeal made by Democratic candidates in 2022.

All these tax changes will be more than offset by the increases. Democrats are oblivious to the fact that the changes made during the 2023 session will put us into a tax revenue and big government death spiral that will only be overcome by rolling back some of these programs and reining in state government spending.

### More government spending equals more state employees

The ongoing spending (paid for with new revenue from tax increases) is now baked into the base budget. Since the government doesn't produce anything, most of its costs come from personnel in the form of government jobs. The new budget includes thousands of new state government (union) employees. Hundreds will work for newly created bureaucracies for Paid Family Leave, Cannabis Management, and Children, Youth, and Families.

As usual, spending on Health and Human Services (HHS) received the largest increase in spending. The failure to control the growth in HHS spending will come back to haunt the state when revenues inevitably drop, and Minnesota finds itself in a deficit.

### Education spending on autopilot

Every session, legislators in both parties cave to the teachers' union and add





money to the per-pupil funding formula. But this year, Democrats took it a step further by automatically tying future increases to inflation — sort of. The formula will now increase automatically at the rate of the Consumer Price Index (CPI), but within a band not less than two percent or greater than three percent per year. So, the largest expenditure in the state budget will automatically increase between two and three percent every year. This works fine when there is a \$17.6 billion surplus but will cause tremendous pressure to raise taxes in future years if Minnesota is facing a budget deficit.

Since K-12 education and HHS spending account for almost 70 percent of the entire state budget, putting them on automatic spending increases is unsustainable.

To further deepen the potential black hole in the education budget, the state now mandates that local school districts allow their seasonal hourly employees, such as bus drivers and cooks, to participate in the unemployment insurance program for the summer. This will raise insurance costs for every school district and take even more workers out of the labor force as hourly school workers collect unemployment instead of seeking another job during the summer months.

The unfunded mandate of inserting divisive ethnic studies into the entire K-12 curriculum will also cost local school districts money as they are forced to add new permanent staff.

### More money on the state credit card

Although Minnesota has a constitutional requirement for a balanced budget, the legislature is allowed to borrow money for capital building projects. In the 2023 session, they committed future taxpayers to \$1.5 billion in debt, to be paid off over the next 20 years. Debt service has become one of the fastest growing areas of the state budget. In addition to borrowing, the bill included another \$900 million in cash spending on projects, otherwise known as pork.

The 2023 capital projects bill includes hundreds of millions of dollars for

swimming pools, hockey rinks, curling clubs, art centers, film facilities, bike paths, community centers, zoos, ski chalets, and our favorite, the National Loon Center.

Thirteen cities convinced state taxpayers to pay for their fire or police stations, including Edina, Hibbing, and Minneapolis. Why are income taxes used for police and fire stations in some cities while everyone else uses their property taxes? The bill also includes millions for local street projects in cities like Savage, Burnsville, and Plymouth. Again, local streets should be paid for with property taxes, not state income taxes. Another core function of cities is

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**Democrats are oblivious to the fact that the changes made during the 2023 session will put us into a tax revenue and big government death spiral.**

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water management. There are millions of dollars in the bill to pay for water treatment and wastewater management projects in cities across the state. Why do some cities receive money for local street and water projects from the state while the rest use their property tax levy?

Cities that plan ahead and take care of their infrastructure look like suckers when other cities get the legislature to fund their core services. Walz also signed a bill this year to fund the replacement of lead pipes throughout the state. Again, many cities don't have any lead pipes left because they used property tax revenue to upgrade their infrastructure over the years.

An analysis of which districts won the capital projects lottery shows that it's not necessarily the powerful committee chairs and senior members securing these pork projects for their districts. In fact, it's the opposite. Much of the pork goes to districts represented by newer, more politically vulnerable members under

the mistaken belief that “bringing home the bacon” will bolster their reelection chances. There is no evidence that delivering projects in a borrowing bill leads to electoral success.

### Higher electricity costs and blackouts

One of the first things passed in the 2023 session was the “Blackout Bill,” requiring all electricity in Minnesota to come from carbon-free sources by the year 2040. No one who supported the bill, including Walz, has any idea how much it will cost the state, or more importantly, how much it will increase electricity prices for consumers. American Experiment testified at every opportunity, warning legislators the bill will cost electricity customers an average of \$3,880 per year, but we were politely ignored. Walz calls climate change an “existential threat to Minnesota” and promised this legislation will lead to “reliable, affordable electricity for all Minnesotans,” but never provided any proof for these claims.

The Blackout Bill will cost Minnesotans billions between now and 2040 and will help cripple any economic growth in our state. In the highly regulated world of public utilities, electricity price increases are not only de facto tax increases, they are regressive tax increases, hitting the poor and middle class the hardest.

### Paid family leave

This massive new state government program requires its own tax on every employee and employer and creates a new bureaucracy with up to 400 employees. Large companies that already offer paid family leave will not be able to match the generous state benefits, so they will be forced to fold up their programs and join the state plan. Small businesses will be forced to make tough decisions about how to stay open when key employees go on paid leave, likely resulting in job loss. There are no exemptions for small businesses — everyone is mandated to pay the tax and join the program. Forcing companies to



give paid time off sounds good, but it will slow down Minnesota’s GDP growth and result in lower wages and fewer jobs for Minnesotans.

## Free stuff

Many are asking how hard it will be to undo some policy changes made during the 2023 session. The answer is that it’s possible, but it will be difficult. Once the government gives people something, it is hard politically to take it away. And the Walz/DFL coalition gave Minnesotans lots of “free” stuff this session.

- Free lunch and breakfast for all students, no matter their family income.
- Free college tuition for students whose parents make less than \$80,000 per year and illegal immigrants.
- Free health care for illegal immigrants.
- Free housing.
- Free time off from your job if you’re pregnant or to take care of family.
- Free childcare.
- Free menstrual products in all school bathrooms, including boys’.

Of course, none of these things are actually free. They cost real money paid by real taxpayers until there are not enough taxpayers willing to pay. Margaret Thatcher famously said, “The problem with socialism is that you eventually run out of other people’s money.” With the increase in permanent spending, paid family leave, education funding tied to inflation, and free stuff for everyone, Minnesota is on the verge of running out of other people’s money.

## Minnesota is less safe

Ever since the riots of 2020, 80 percent of Minnesotans have consistently told the *Thinking Minnesota* pollsters they are concerned with crime. Unfortunately, nothing was done to improve the public safety situation in our state during the 2023 session. In fact, the state will be *less* safe. The most damaging legislation will allow all but the most violent criminals in our prison system the opportunity to

cut their sentences if they enroll in one or more of the Department of Corrections commissioner’s rehabilitation programs. The state shouldn’t have to lower sentences to achieve the worthy goal of inmates going through drug and alcohol treatment or education programs.

The legislature also legalized recreational marijuana use, with bill authors claiming it will make the state a better place to live. That claim will be hard to realize with the black market getting a one-year head start on retail operations and a tax and regulatory scheme many pot growers will choose to ignore. Instead of passing laws to end the lawlessness that continues in our cities, the legislature wasted time and energy passing two gun control measures that will have more impact on law-abiding gun owners than criminals.

## Stacking the deck in elections

There is a tradition in the Minnesota legislature that bills dealing with election law achieve bipartisan support. After supporting the tradition in his first term, Walz suddenly had no use for it now that his party controls the House and Senate. In fact, Democrats in the Minnesota legislature passed a series of partisan election law changes that will result in more Democrats voting in the next election.

Democrats voted to allow convicted felons the right to vote even before their sentence is finished (in other words, once they are out of prison but still on probation). Many felons never spend a day in prison, so after this change, they will never lose their right to vote. Another change will automatically register everyone who receives a driver’s license or state ID card to vote, including 16- and 17-year-olds.

The most dangerous change from a voter fraud standpoint is the creation of a lifetime absentee voter list, so voters won’t have to ask for a ballot each election. Making absentee voting “automatic” under the guise of convenience is inviting fraud. Another provision will criminalize speech by making it a gross misdemeanor

to “transmit false information” about an election within 60 days of voting. Chilling.

## Minnesota’s new tourism: abortion and trans refuge

The liberal wing of the legislature didn’t have to work hard to convince Walz to sign a suite of bills making Minnesota an island of radical social policy in the Midwest. They stripped all abortion language from state law, making our state the most permissive and liberal in the country (and the world) when it comes to abortion on demand, up to and beyond the moment of birth. They passed a trans refuge bill that protects “gender affirming care” for children, including chemical castration and genital mutilation. And they created a new protected class under the state’s human rights statutes for pedophiles. Walz and legislative leaders repeatedly referenced these bills as part of their plan to attract people to Minnesota.

## There is hope

While it would be natural for Minnesotans to view the 2023 session as overwhelmingly negative, there are reasons for hope. First, some good policy made it across the finish line this year including stronger price transparency rules in health care that will provide a market-based hedge against efforts to socialize medicine and increase costs. The legislature also made important changes to how we teach reading in the state, bringing back proven phonics-based curriculum. And Walz asked for and received funding for an Office of Inspector General at the Minnesota Department of Education to investigate and prosecute fraud.

For decades, going back to that iconic *TIME* magazine cover celebrating the “state that works,” Minnesota’s strong and diverse economy has enabled our steady march toward big government socialism. The policies and budget enacted during the 2023 legislative session will strain that economy more than ever, but Minnesotans usually prevail. If you’re not convinced, maybe find peace in this fact: The next legislative session doesn’t begin until February. ★





# REGULATION NATION

Impulsive expansion  
of health regulations  
will harm patients.

**Anyone who lives in Minnesota** knows the state is home to world-class health care. *Newsweek* calls the Mayo Clinic in Rochester the world's best hospital. The nation's largest health insurer — UnitedHealth Group — keeps growing in Minnetonka. Thanks to these companies and a strong cluster of inventive medtech companies like Medtronic and St. Jude, the region was dubbed Medical Alley in 1984.

By Peter Nelson

Living along Medical Alley, Minnesotans have understandably become accustomed to getting the best health care anywhere. However, there's no guarantee that the state's health care system will remain world-class for the next generation of Minnesotans.

Whether you're a pro hockey player, a Fortune 500 CEO, or the "state that works," complacency poses one of the biggest dangers to those on top. There's reason to believe that Minnesota has been riding the success of previous generations and become less equipped to lead and succeed in the future.

However, since Democrats took full control over state government this year, complacency is no longer a top concern for Minnesota's health care system. Rather, the state is now dealing with the exact opposite problem: An impulsive move by Democrats to dramatically expand health care regulations. During the 2023 legislative session, Minnesota lawmakers enacted a radical new vision with big changes that tighten the government's bureaucratic control over health care.

These policy changes put patients at risk. That's because they rely on a public utility model to tightly control key parts of the health care system similar to how the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (MPUC) controls how electric utilities like Excel Energy run every aspect of their business. This tighter government grip will ultimately undermine future investments and innovation to deliver better patient care.

### **Democrats build a bigger bureaucracy**

Upon taking control of the legislature this year, Democrats worked to adopt nearly every far-left health care policy that's been moving through other deep blue states in recent years. To start, they created a Prescription Drug Affordability Board — an unelected, politically-appointed bureaucracy with power to set an upper payment limit on the price of drugs. Another price control sets up a regime that narrowly targets generics for so-called "excessive" price increases.

To increase oversight over providers,

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**During the 2023 legislative session, Minnesota lawmakers enacted a radical new vision with big changes that tighten the government's bureaucratic control over health care.**

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they created a Center for Health Care Affordability to identify drivers of health care spending growth with the power to require private health care entities to open their books and report data. The law establishes a Health Subcabinet that can use this data to push private entities to change the way they deliver and pay for care.

Several other provisions work to micromanage health plan designs, including a requirement for each health insurer to offer the same standardized plan alongside their other plan options. The law also directs the state to offer a public health plan option to compete with private plans. Essentially, the government took over the health plan options available. Finally, they took steps to plan for the adoption of a

single-payer, "universal health care financing system," which would remove private health plan options entirely.

These are just the major elements of the Democrat's far-left health care agenda that became law. Hundreds of other policies spread across three omnibus bills spanning 1,368 pages fill in the complete picture. Altogether, they collect the worst of top-down, government-knows-best regulations that will cement Minnesota's position among the most tightly regulated health care states in America.

### **Democrats embrace a public utility model**

The new health care boards and regulations that Democrats just put in place aim to fundamentally transform how Minnesota's health care system operates and evolves. Their new vision embraces what may best be described as a public utility model.

Utilities like Excel Energy and CenterPoint Energy have been strictly governed by the MPUC for decades. The MPUC plays a role in approving nearly every major business decision for utilities, including whether they can invest in new facilities and whether they can raise or even lower rates on consumers. This level of oversight requires the MPUC to pore over each utility's financials and other proprietary business information. The process also requires complicated economic modeling to project future impacts of any decision, such as a decision to shut down a natural gas plant or spend more on energy conservation projects.

The new Prescription Drug Affordability Board and the proposed Health Care Affordability Board are designed to function very similarly to the MPUC. Each is empowered to limit costs and influence business policies. Each requires access to proprietary business information to set the "right" prices, which is needed to feed the models to project how the board's decisions will impact important things like patient care, the financial



sustainability of rural hospitals, and incentives to innovate new drugs. The most troubling similarity: All of these truly life-and-death decisions are made by an unelected, politically-appointed bureaucracy.

While Mayo may have held off the Health Care Affordability Board, it's been replaced by a new Center for Health Care Affordability in the Department of Health, which still has the power to demand the same proprietary business information to build out a robust data analytics capability to closely scrutinize business operations. The law also establishes a new Health Subcabinet made up largely of executive branch department heads, including the Health Commissioner, who are directed to "coordinate state and, as applicable, private sector efforts to reform the health care delivery and payment systems." So, even without

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**Altogether, [the omnibus bills] collect the worst of top-down, government-knows-best regulations that will cement Minnesota's position among the most tightly regulated health care states in America.**

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the power to enforce limits on cost growth, these two entities are together still empowered to demand reports from the private sector and use those reports to, *as applicable*, strong-arm the private sector. Moreover, the two entities lay the foundation to quickly establish a more powerful board as originally proposed when the timing is better.

As noted previously, the law also adds dozens of new requirements for providers and health plans. So, in addition to being micromanaged by unelected, politically-appointed bureaucracies, the growth in statutory

requirements further micromanages the health system — another similarity with the public utilities.

### **Democrats' new model will harm patients**

A public utility model will always hold back the health care system from achieving the best results for patients. The only reason public utilities need strict oversight from the MPUC is because they are natural monopolies with no competition. But this approach comes with a major tradeoff. The intrusion of prescriptive statutes and MPUC oversight stalls business decisions and innovation. It can take five to 10 years to get major generation or transmission projects approved. However, the public is willing to make this tradeoff because innovation is not a top concern for the electricity and gas industries. People just want to know their lights and furnace will go on.

Unlike electricity and gas distribution — a process that relies on century-old technology — innovation in health care is everything. People are unwilling to trade innovations that improve their health and save lives. Yet, that is exactly the trade-off the Democrats' new public utility model approach to health care requires. The state simply cannot layer on regulations and bureaucracies without getting in the way of new drug development, better patient care management, and quick access to the latest treatments. Patients will be harmed.

### **Health sector forms a circular firing squad**

Unfortunately, patients have no idea what is coming because every major player in the health sector has focused on protecting their turf and otherwise kept quiet. Worse, they've turned on each other in a blame game trying to deflect

the damage from Democrat policies on other players. Like most circular firing squads, this strategy did not go well.

Even if one player deflected some damage this year, pointing fingers and asking for heavier regulation on other players in the health sector affirmed the idea that there are circumstances when state lawmakers can and should micromanage the health care sector. By giving that idea momentum, all the participants in the blame game invited tighter regulations on themselves in the future.

Throughout the session, generic drug manufacturers urged lawmakers to focus drug price controls on high-cost, brand-name drugs. Branded drug manufacturers highlighted how insurers and pharmacy benefit managers (PBMs) contribute to higher drug costs and, instead of drug price controls, urged lawmakers to support caps on copays and other top-down government regulations on health plans. In turn, the health plans eventually put their full support behind drug price controls. Doctors also entered this fray with their qualified support for a public health plan option — they support it so long as they get paid enough.

Hospitals largely kept out of this fray and limited their public comments to oppose policies that directly impact their operations and bottom line. Though hospitals didn't join the circular firing squad, their quiet voice through the legislative session kept Minnesotans in the dark about the serious risks the Democrats' policies pose to patients. The only major alert — and only on two policies — came when the Mayo Clinic made national news with an ultimatum. In the final weeks of the session, the Mayo Clinic sent an email to Democrat legislative leaders and Gov. Tim Walz warning that if two policies became law, Mayo would redirect billions in planned



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**The state simply cannot layer on regulations and bureaucracies without getting in the way of new drug development, better patient care management, and quick access to the latest treatments. Patients will be harmed.**

investments to other states. In response to Mayo's ultimatum, both provisions were watered down.

### **Principled push back**

The only principled, consistent effort to educate the public on how the Democrats' health care agenda would impact patients came from American Experiment and the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce. While the drug manufacturers, PBMs, health plans, and doctors were blaming each other, the Minnesota Chamber provided principled positions and arguments against pretty much every new regulation the Democrats proposed.

American Experiment also regularly sat down at the testifying table to summarize the in-depth written testimony that we submitted to the committees that heard the bills. The depth of these analyses was unmatched by any

organization and that is true across each of the major issue areas that American Experiment covers at the Capitol.

Looking back at the legislative session, without the Minnesota Chamber and American Experiment, there would be little record of the serious danger the Democrats' health policies pose to Minnesota's health care system and the patients who depend on it.

### **Public utility model cannot escape the iron triangle**

In health care, people often talk about the triple aim — the idea that health care reforms should simultaneously aim to improve health care access, cost, and quality. People also talk about the iron triangle — the idea that access, cost, and quality cannot be simultaneously improved. The iron triangle acknowledges how policy changes tend to always present tradeoffs. Improving quality or increasing access tends to cost more money, while imposing cost controls tends to limit investments in better quality and broader access. For instance, the push to measure quality has imposed a huge administrative cost on health systems.

The iron triangle clearly applies to the Democrats' public utility model approach. As noted previously, the state simply cannot impose heavy regulations to control costs without negatively impacting patient care. No matter how much the state claims to study or account for potential negative impacts, a big government approach cannot efficiently decide what price is too high, how many hospital beds are too few, or the ratio of nurses needed at the bedside.

### **Competition model can achieve the triple aim**

In contrast to a public utility model, a competition driven model to reform health care is not trapped in the iron triangle. Most major industries deliver higher quality products and services at a lower cost to more people through a competition driven model. Phones, cars, laundry detergent, bikes, and refrigerators get better year after year because companies must compete to meet consumer demand.

Minnesota can likewise have a health

care system that simultaneously delivers broader access to higher quality at a lower cost. To get there, the state needs to finally begin replacing the perverse incentives that pervade the health care system with new incentives that push health plans, providers, and drug companies to compete to deliver more innovative care and treatment models at a lower cost.

### **Price transparency, the first step**

A move to a competition driven model starts by making sure patients have ready access to prices. Hidden pricing is a key contributor to the high and rising cost of health care in America. Upfront pricing information is essential to an efficient and competitive market. In any market for goods and services, consumers need pricing information to make sound, cost-conscious decisions. Yet, prices are hidden from patients because health care is largely financed through third-party health plans.

Fortunately, there's been bipartisan support to require price transparency both nationally and in Minnesota. The Trump administration implemented federal rules requiring hospitals and health plans to disclose prices to patients — a move the Biden administration continues to strongly support. Last year, Republicans and Democrats in the Minnesota legislature sponsored bills to strengthen and expand upon these federal rules. This year, these proposals became law. American Experiment played a lead role in making this happen by doing the initial research, working directly with legislators, and providing lead testimony.

The enactment of price transparency creates some irony and optimism. While the Democrats adopted a public utility model with heavy-handed price controls, they also agreed to take the necessary first step toward a competition driven model. If price transparency creates enough competitive pressure to control costs, there may be nothing to trigger any regulatory action or overbearing oversight from the new bureaucracies the Democrats just put in place. Short of paring back any of these newly enacted laws, that's the best outlook for Minnesota patients. ★





The  
**THINKING**  
MINNESOTA  
POLL



# CANCEL THE MARCHING BAND

Most Minnesotans disapprove of the Walz/DFL legislative agenda.

**W**ith Gov. Tim Walz and DFL legislators patting themselves on the back, taking exuberant selfies, and firing up the marching band, most Minnesotans in the latest *Thinking Minnesota* Poll told pollsters they are not on board with their so-called “transformative” agenda. Fifty-nine percent of Minnesotans rated the work of the legislature as “only fair” or “poor.” This is an astonishingly large number considering the amount of positive coverage the 2023 legislative session received from a fawning press. The fact that the poll was taken just as the session was ending makes it even more astonishing.

Minnesotans’ displeasure with the legislature clearly influenced the fact that 51 percent told us the state is now on the wrong track, with only 43 percent saying it’s on the right

track. This is the first time in the Walz era that most Minnesotans believe the state is on the wrong track. In March 2019, 57 percent of Minnesotans believed the state was on the right track.

This recent poll was conducted during the last days of the legislative session by Meeting Street Insights, a nationally recognized polling operation based in Charleston, S.C. Using a mix of cell phones and landline phones, the company interviewed 500 registered voters across Minnesota from May 21-23, 2023. The margin of error is  $\pm 4.38$  percent.

“After all the positive coverage of the Democrats’ legislative agenda, it’s shocking to see more than half the state thinks we’re on the wrong track,” said John Hinderaker, president of Center of the American Experiment.

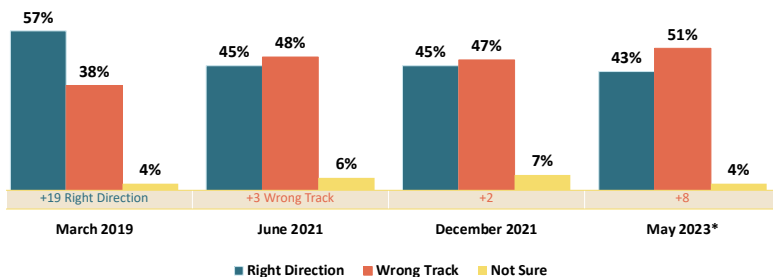
The legislative approval numbers track with earlier *Thinking*





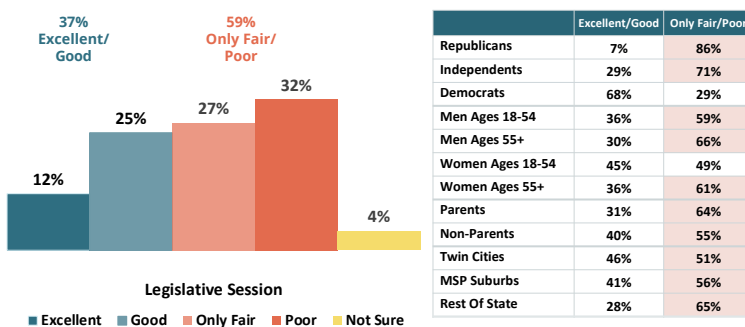
**FIGURE 1: A majority of Minnesotans continue to say the state is on the wrong track.**

“First, thinking about things here in Minnesota, generally speaking, would you say that things in Minnesota are going in the right direction, or have they gotten off on the wrong track?”



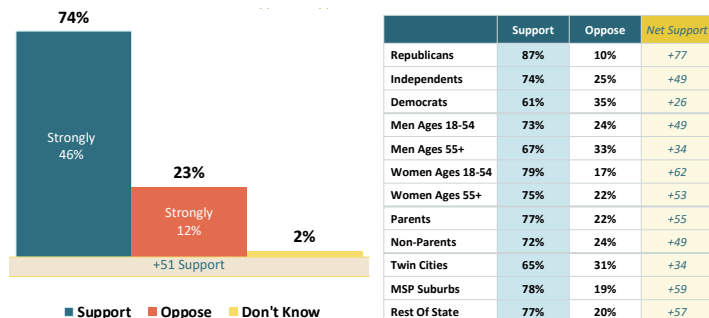
**FIGURE 2: Minnesotans are, largely, unimpressed by the work being done in the state legislature, especially those ages 55+ and in rural Minnesota.**

“Now, thinking about the state legislature, overall, has the work done so far by the Minnesota state legislature during the current legislative session been...”



**FIGURE 3: School choice widely popular, drawing strong support from Republicans, Democrats, and Independents alike.**

“As you may know, school choice gives parents the right to use the tax dollars designated for their child’s education to send their child to the public or private school which best serves their needs. Generally speaking, would you say you support or oppose the concept of school choice?”



Minnesota polling that showed little support for many of the marquee items on the Democrats’ 2023 agenda. Raising the sales tax in the metro area to pay for transit projects is opposed by 58 percent of Minnesotans. Adding a fee on all retail deliveries such as those from Amazon, Fed-Ex, or Door Dash is opposed by 72 percent of Minnesotans. Raising the fee for car tabs is opposed by 81 percent of Minnesotans. Sex-change operations for minors are opposed by 67 percent of Minnesotans. Restoring the right to vote for convicted

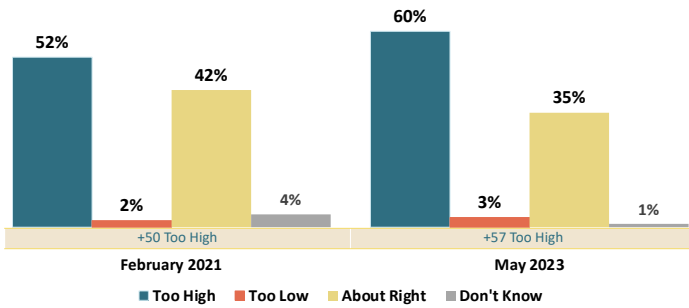
**About the pollster**

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



**FIGURE 4: Minnesotans are now even more prone to believing tax rates are too high.**

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



felons *before* they serve their full sentences is opposed by 60 percent of Minnesotans. Creating a new payroll tax to pay for a state-run paid family leave program is opposed by 50 percent of Minnesotans.

In addition to voicing concern over what did pass, poll respondents also weighed in on issues the legislature did not address, beginning with school choice. A strong majority (74 percent) favor a school choice policy where parents can use tax dollars to send their child to a public or private school that best serves their needs. Even 61 percent of *Democrats* supported school choice, though no elected Democrat would dare cross the teachers’ union and support this reform.

Minnesotans also overwhelmingly (80 percent) believe that school closures caused by our overreaction to COVID-19 had a negative effect on children. There has been no movement on this question since we asked it one year ago, and it is unlikely to change in the future.

Minnesotans have also made up their minds about crime and public safety. In our current poll,

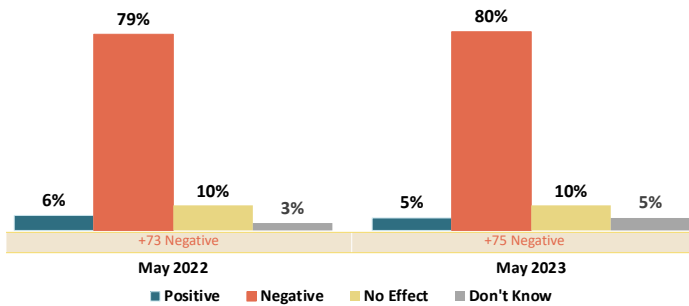
77 percent of respondents are personally concerned about the level of crime in Minnesota, a very high number and consistent with the last two times we asked this question in June 2021 (81 percent) and December 2021 (86 percent). It’s a sad state of affairs in Minnesota when residents are resigned to the fact that high crime is now a way of life.

While Walz and the Democratic majorities in the legislature spent the entire surplus and raised taxes an additional \$9 billion over the next four years, 60 percent of poll respondents said that income tax rates in Minnesota are too high, an increase of eight percent since we asked the question in February 2021. Only

The legislative approval numbers track with earlier *Thinking Minnesota* polling that showed little support for many of the **marquee items on the Democrat’s 2023 agenda.**

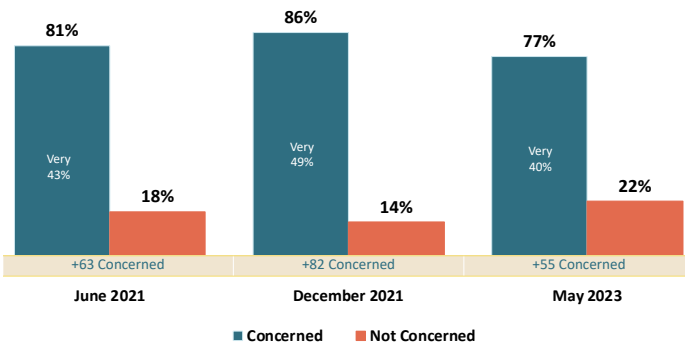
**FIGURE 5: Minnesotans overwhelmingly continue to believe COVID school closures have had a predominately negative effect on children.**

“Now, thinking about education in the wake of COVID-19, do you think school closures in Minnesota have had a positive or negative effect on children, or did it not really affect them either way?”



**FIGURE 6: Minnesotans remain quite concerned about the level of crime in the state.**

“How concerned are you personally about the level of crime here in Minnesota?”



**“On taxes, the leaders in St. Paul listened to the three percent who think taxes are too low. On education, Democrats continue to ignore the most effective, and now most popular, reform yet to be tried in Minnesota: real school choice.”**

—John Hinderaker, president of Center of the American Experiment



three percent said taxes were too low.

“On taxes, the leaders in St. Paul listened to the three percent who think taxes are too low,” added Hinderaker. “On education, Democrats continue to ignore the most effective, and now most popular, reform yet to be tried in Minnesota: real school choice.”

With all the talk of Minnesotans leaving the state because of decisions made at the Capitol, we asked respondents a series of questions about their attitudes and beliefs about the state. Generally speaking, Minnesotans told us they are happy with the state, with 71 percent saying they would rather live here than somewhere else if given the chance to move. As with many things in Minnesota, this question divided people by party, with Democrats (89 percent) much happier with the state than Republicans (51 percent). Would that change if the government was controlled by the other party?

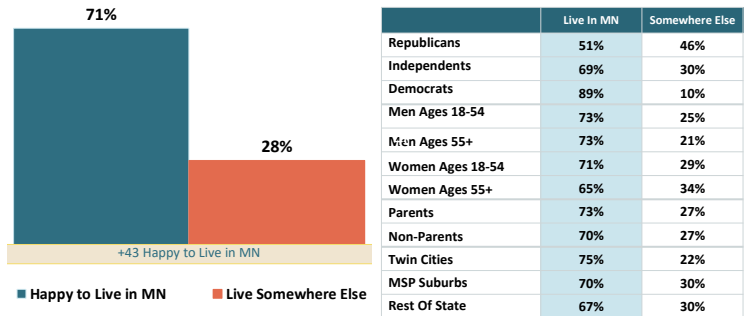
Digging a little deeper gets us past that famous Minnesota homerism and reveals that 6-in-10 respondents think their children are likely to move outside of the state of Minnesota. So, the state is great for us, but our kids are likely to leave.

Pessimism regarding the prospects of the next generation is a sober and honest concern for policymakers as they come to grips with two troubling trends. First, economic growth in Minnesota has lagged the national average every year since 2014. Second, Minnesota is now a net loser to intrastate migration, losing 19,400 people to other states last year. Worse, Minnesota lost residents in every single age category; it is not limited to retirees looking for warmer climates or young people heading off to college.

The 2023 legislative session may go down in history as the “selfie session,” with Walz and key legislators congratulating themselves on their policy wins with giddy social media posts, raucous bill signing ceremonies complete with marching bands, and orchestrated drone videos. But the data in the last two *Thinking Minnesota* polls shows most of the public is not buying what they are selling. Before they return to St. Paul in February, legislative leaders and the governor need to spend more time with average Minnesotans to ensure the celebrations match the public’s mood — before they all leave the state. ★

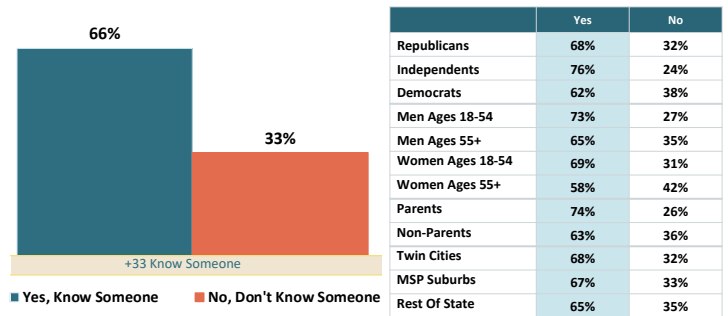
**Figure 7: Minnesotans are generally happy living here, especially Democrats.**

“In general, are you happy you live in Minnesota or given the chance, would you rather live somewhere else?”



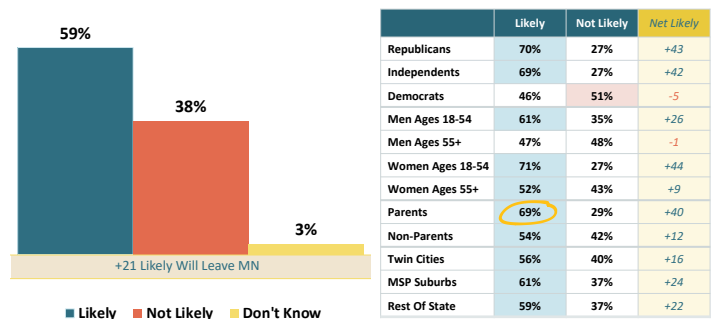
**FIGURE 8: However, two-thirds know someone who has left the state in the past five years.**

“And, do you personally know anyone who has left and moved outside of Minnesota in the past five years?”



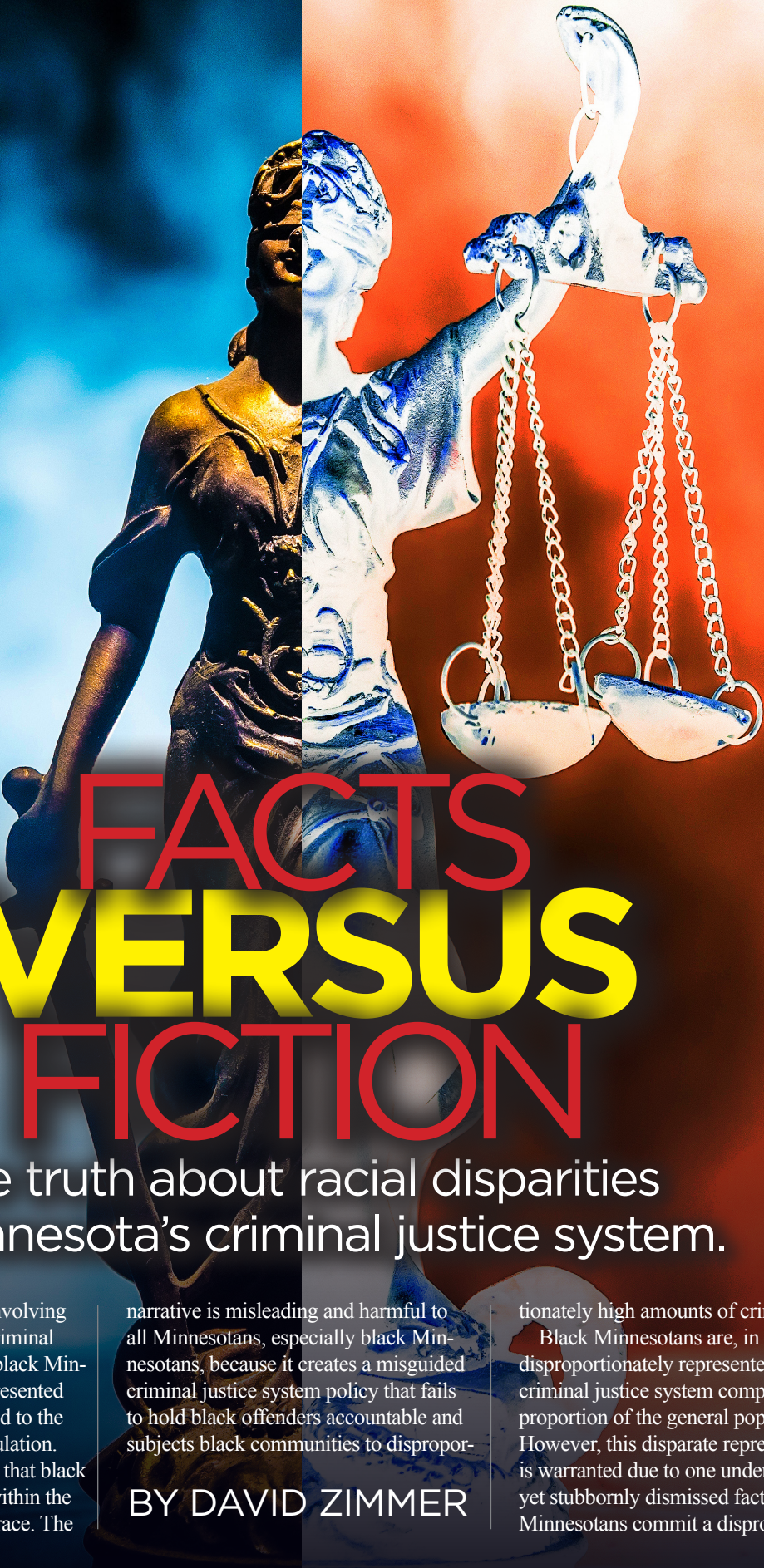
**FIGURE 9: 6-in-10 think the next generation is likely to move outside the state, including nearly 7-in-10 parents.**

“Thinking once more about your children or the next generation, how likely do you think it is that they will leave and move outside of Minnesota?”





≡ CRIMINAL  
JUSTICE



# FACTS VERSUS FICTION

The truth about racial disparities  
in Minnesota's criminal justice system.

**T**he persistent refrain involving race in Minnesota's criminal justice system is that black Minnesotans are over-represented throughout the system compared to the same cohort in the general population. This common narrative implies that black people are treated disparately within the system for no other reason but race. The

narrative is misleading and harmful to all Minnesotans, especially black Minnesotans, because it creates a misguided criminal justice system policy that fails to hold black offenders accountable and subjects black communities to dispropor-

BY DAVID ZIMMER

tionately high amounts of crime.

Black Minnesotans are, in fact, disproportionately represented in the criminal justice system compared to their proportion of the general population. However, this disparate representation is warranted due to one undeniable yet stubbornly dismissed fact: black Minnesotans commit a disproportionate



amount of crime, especially serious crimes likely to result in incarceration. This fact is critical to acknowledge if a serious, fact-based evaluation of current criminal justice system disparities is to take place.

The data shows that blacks represent nine times more criminal offenders overall and 10 times more serious offenders than whites. If the system was systemically racist and the system practitioners were individually biased, those ratios would worsen for blacks at each subsequent stage of the criminal justice system. But they don't — and it isn't close. In direct conflict with the prevailing narrative, the disparities that follow criminal offenders through the system are frequently more favorable to black offenders and less favorable to white offenders.

Policymakers seem content to parrot the established narrative that unfair racial disparities exist and therefore, must be unwarranted. As a result, they continue to develop policies aimed at correcting problems that often don't exist. Policies built around the narrative of “unwarranted racial disparities” deflect attention and resources away from real problems, such as what drives the disproportionate levels of criminal offending in the black community.

Solutions to address racial disparities that exist *inside* the criminal justice system must focus on the causes of crime that exist *outside* the system.

## Misleading definition of racial disparities

According to the Department of Justice, “Racial disparity’ is defined as existing in the *criminal justice system* when the ‘proportion of a racial/ethnic group within the control of the system is greater than the proportion of such groups in the *general population*.’” [Emphasis added.]

The use of the *general population* rather than the *offender population* as the denominator in this calculation is misleading. It creates a narrative that unwarranted racial disparities are pervasive throughout the criminal justice system, and that the system must rectify this injustice through policies designed

to treat offenders differently based on their race. Such a narrative has become foundational to nearly all criminal justice system policy development. If the narrative is based on misleading representations of the data, as this analysis contends, then the narrative represents a significant problem.

It is mathematically impeccable to divide the number of adult black Minnesotans in prison by the number of adult black Minnesotans in the general population and come up with a sum. The result of that mathematical calculation indicates black adult Minnesotans are incarcerated 9.6 times more than white

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**In direct conflict with the prevailing narrative, the disparities that follow criminal offenders through the system are frequently more favorable to black offenders and less favorable to white offenders.**

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adult Minnesotans. That calculation is technically accurate and the disparity it reflects should be something of profound societal interest to eliminate. However, this calculation is not helpful in determining whether the *criminal justice system* is responsible for creating or exacerbating the disparity. Unfortunately, the disparity is regularly relied upon as the basis for creating criminal justice system policies that treat criminal offenders differently based on race.

A more relevant evaluation of disparities *within* the criminal justice system comes by comparing the proportion of a racial group within the control of the system to the *offender population*, not the *general population*. Eighty-five percent of black and 98 percent of white Minnesotans are law-abiding citizens. Using these general

population sets as the denominator in the computation of criminal justice system racial disparities lead to misleading conclusions and misguided responses. It suggests the criminal justice system is unjustly plucking law-abiding citizens off the street, placing them in the system, and treating them disparately, all based on race. The narrative this creates undermines the criminal justice system, making it less effective and ultimately making all Minnesotans less safe.

## Methodology

This analysis follows black and white adult serious offender data sets (those most likely to go to prison) through the criminal justice system in 2021, as this is the most frequent comparison made in terms of racial disparities.

It also represents a unique examination of criminal justice system data — offender data by race. The Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension (BCA) began collecting and reporting this data for the first time in 2021. This new data allows for a more accurate determination of how the system is operating by using *offender* rather than *general population* data sets. Previous efforts have either used large *general population* data sets or relied on *arrestee population data sets* (which are a less complete reflection of criminal activity, and which are arguably more susceptible to law enforcement bias).

A significant source of *offender* identification comes from offender descriptions provided by victims, witnesses, and reporting parties of crime, leading to a more reliable and unbiased data set than traditional *arrestee* data sets.

This analysis followed offenders through each step of the system to provide ample opportunity at a variety of points to evaluate whether unwarranted disparities existed or were developed.

This analysis compared *offender data* against:

- 1) 2021 U.S. Census Bureau data for adult Minnesotans, as used by the Minnesota Department of Corrections (DOC);
- 2) 2021 adult arrest data held by the Minnesota BCA;



- 3) 2021 charging data held by the Minnesota District Courts;
- 4) 2021 sentencing and incarceration data held by the Minnesota Sentencing Guidelines Commission; and
- 5) Imprisonment data for the end of 2022, held and reported by the Minnesota DOC on January 1, 2023.

## The data Offenders

Offender identification represents activity at the earliest stage of the criminal justice system. The offender's race is collected when victims, witnesses, or reporting parties contact the police to report a crime.

Using offender identification data allows for a more meaningful and relevant comparison with the subsequent criminal justice system action: arrests, charges, sentences, and incarceration.

Despite representing just seven percent of Minnesota's adult population, blacks represent 27 percent of all criminal offenders.

For all offenses tracked by the BCA in 2021, blacks were nine times more likely to be criminal offenders than whites on a per capita basis.

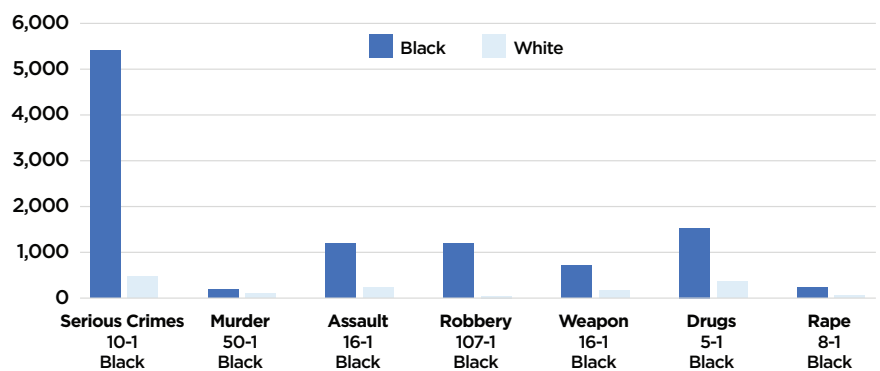
Offender disparity became even greater as the seriousness of criminal offenses increased. For example, blacks were 10 times more likely to be serious crime offenders, 50 times more likely to be murder offenders, and 107 times more likely to be robbery offenders than whites, per capita.

If the criminal justice system were operating in a biased and systemically racist manner, it would stand to reason that these ratios would worsen for black offenders as they moved through each stage of the system. That isn't what the data shows. In fact, the disparities in arrest, charging, and incarceration rates consistently *disfavored whites* throughout each stage of the criminal justice system.

### Arrests

Dramatically, the racial disparities in the offender category flipped in the arrest category. In 2021, white offenders in Minnesota were 1.7 times more likely to be arrested for all crimes than black offenders. The disparity of arrests disfavoring white offenders was

## Minnesota Adult Criminal Offenders – 2021 Ratio Derived from Rate of Offenders per 100,000 Population



Source: Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension, Crime Data Explorer

consistent across nearly all crimes, with one notable exception: weapon crimes. Here, black offenders were 1.3 times more likely to be arrested than white offenders. This disparity likely reflects the level of gun violence in Minnesota's black communities and the resulting increased law enforcement response in those areas.

When comparing serious crime arrests, white offenders were 1.6 times more likely to be arrested than black offenders. This disparity was most pronounced in the rate of robbery arrests, where white offenders were three times more likely to be arrested than black offenders.

Notably, drug arrests, which are often the result of proactive police activity and arguably more susceptible to police bias, were also more likely to *disfavor* white offenders by a factor of 1.2.

### Charges

The ratio of criminal charges continued favoring black offenders and disfavoring white offenders in 2021. White offenders were 1.8 times more likely to be charged with a serious offense than black offenders and outpaced black offenders

in each category except for weapon offense charges. White offenders were nearly twice as likely to be charged with murder.

### Sentencing

The pattern of disparities favoring black offenders and disfavoring white offenders continued at sentencing. In 2021, Minnesota District Courts pronounced *felony* sentences on 14,429 offenders. Of those sentenced, 8,217 were white offenders and 3,684 were black offenders. Not all felony sentences resulted in prison or local confinement. In terms of pronounced *prison* sentences, there were a total of 1,561 white and 871 black offenders who received prison sentences in 2021.

As a ratio of serious offenders (those crimes most likely to result in a prison sentence), white serious offenders were 1.5 times more likely to receive a pronounced prison sentence than black serious offenders.

Of the crime categories listed, white serious offenders had a higher ratio in all categories except weapon and assault-related sentences. Black assault and



**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.

weapons offenders were each 1.1 times more likely to receive a pronounced prison sentence.

White robbery offenders were 3.7 times more likely to receive a pronounced prison sentence than black robbery offenders.

The sentencing stage also continued to negate the prevailing narrative of biased enforcement and prosecution of drug crimes in Minnesota. White drug offenders were two times more likely to receive a *pronounced prison sentence* (a prison sentence imposed by the court) than black drug offenders.

White serious offenders received a presumptive prison commitment 1.4 times more often than black serious offenders. The ratio of actual prison commitments increased to 1.5 to 1, which is consistent with the ratio of pronounced prison sentences for serious offenders charged that disfavors white offenders.

Judicial departures from the sentencing guidelines were also analyzed. Downward dispositional departures (prison or not) were nearly identical between black and white offenders being sentenced, while downward durational departures (length of time reduced) favored black offenders 1.66 to 1.

### Incarceration

The analysis looked at the rate of serious offenders who received some

form of incarceration as a result of their conviction. The categories included rates of local incarceration in a jail or workhouse, state prison incarceration, and total incarceration. White serious offenders were more likely to receive incarceration in all forms: 2.1-to-1 local incarceration, 1.5-to-1 state prison, and 1.9-to-1 total incarceration.

In the final analysis, a comparison was made between the ratio of black to white as “offenders” and as “prisoners” (as reported by the DOC at the end of 2022). The 10-to-1, black-to-white ratio for serious offenders (those most likely to receive a prison sentence) nearly mirrored the 9.6-to-1 ratio of actual prison inmates — demonstrating that the criminal justice system is *not* creating disparate outcomes adversely affecting black offenders, and in most cases is actually harsher of white offenders throughout each stage.

### Victims

Given the disparate levels of crime committed by black offenders in the black community, black Minnesotans are tragically victimized at disproportionate levels as well.

Analysis of Minnesota’s 2021 crime victims shows that black Minnesotans were 9.5 times more likely than white Minnesotans to be victims of serious crimes (murder, aggravated assault, robbery, burglary, and rape).

It is precisely the findings in this victim analysis that emphasize the damage done to the black community when we gut accountability in a misguided effort to address “disparities.”

### Conclusion

The narrative of unwarranted racial disparities in Minnesota’s criminal justice system is well entrenched. As a result, nearly all criminal justice system policy development starts with the false premise that the system unfairly treats black Minnesotans, starting with enforcement and continuing on through charging, sentencing, and incarceration.

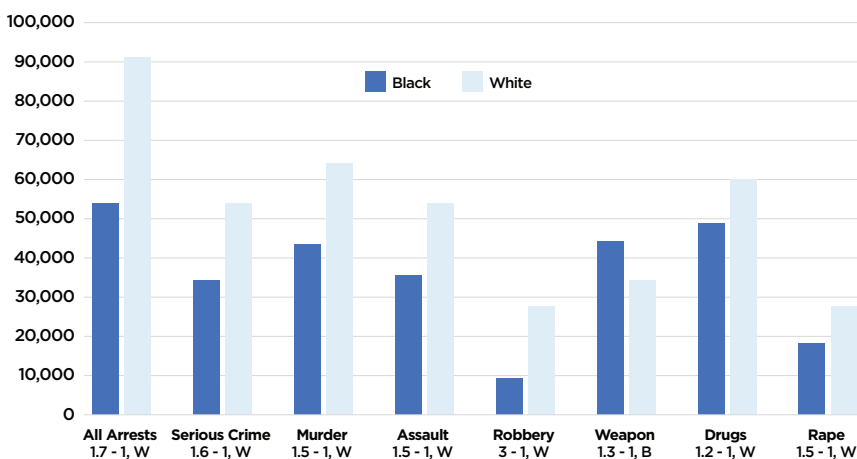
This misleading premise perpetuates policy developments that will likely *exacerbate* racial disparities by failing to hold black offenders accountable and subjecting black communities to disproportionately high amounts of crime.

If the criminal justice system were truly treating black Minnesotans unjustly, then the 10-to-1, black-to-white offender ratio for serious offenses would worsen as black offenders traversed through the system. However, the data shows that not only did the ratio *not* worsen, in most examples the ratios flipped to *favor* black offenders over white offenders.

Attention and resources applied toward criminal justice system policy “reform” would be far more helpful if they were applied toward the drivers of crime: broken families, poor quality education, low-employment levels, and low-homeownership rates, to name a few. This represents a long-term effort that should be implemented in concert with, not in place of, short-term efforts — ensuring swift and sure enforcement and prosecution of criminal offenders.

It is time for policymakers to recognize that Minnesota’s criminal justice system is not creating unwarranted disparities disfavoring black offenders. Altering the system to favor black offenders is a misguided effort — one that will continue to derail, delay, and underfund efforts to address the social disparities that arguably lead to a disproportionate amount of black criminal offenders. ★

**Minnesota Adult Arrests – 2021**  
Ratios Derived from Rate of Applicable Offender Sets



Source: Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension, Crime Data Explorer





≡ Q&A

# NOT BACKING DOWN

Former University of Kentucky swimmer **Riley Gaines** tells *American Experiment*'s **John Hinderaker** about her experience competing at the upper echelon of collegiate sports, what it was like to be forced to compete against biological male Lia Thomas at the 2022 NCAA Women's Swimming Championship, and what's at stake for the future of women's sports.

"They were asking us to kindly smile and step aside and allow a male onto our podiums, **taking our scholarships, our titles, our awards, and our trophies, and pretend this was a woman.**"

—NCAA  
All-American  
swimmer  
Riley Gaines



**R**iley Gaines is an advisor to *Independent Women's Voice* and a recent graduate from the University of Kentucky where

she was a 12-time NCAA All-American swimmer with five SEC titles and a two-time Olympic trial qualifier.

**John Hinderaker: Riley, you've become a hero to a lot of people for the way that you have stood up to the extremist trans mob on behalf of women's sports. And I want to talk about that. But first, you're an athlete of very considerable accomplishment.**

Riley Gaines: I appreciate that a lot. I have accomplished many things in my career that I will forever be proud of. I'm a two-time Olympic trial qualifier, a 12-time NCAA All-American, and a five-time SEC champion — actually, the SEC record holder in the 200 butterfly, which made me one of the fastest Americans of all time. I was also the SEC Scholar-Athlete of the Year and SEC Community Service Leader of the Year. It was a lifelong journey. It's impossible to put into words the amount of time, sacrifice, and dedication it takes to compete at the highest level.

**While you were still at Kentucky and competing in the NCAA, you were among the early women athletes who had an encounter with Lia Thomas and got exposed to the whole trans sports movement. Can you describe that experience?**

During my senior year at the University of Kentucky, I made it my goal to win a national title, which would mean becoming the fastest woman in the nation in my respective event. About midway through my senior year, I was ranked third in the country behind one amazing female athlete I knew very well, ranked

second, but one person I had never heard of before. This was the first time I became aware of a swimmer named Lia Thomas. But for all I knew at the time, this was a girl who came out of nowhere, senior year, to post the fastest times in the nation in multiple events, beating everyone else in the country by multiple seconds. It didn't really make sense until an article came out disclosing that Lia Thomas was formerly Will Thomas, who swam three years on the men's team at

tioned this — why does the trophy go to Lia? I understood there was one trophy, and I understood we tied. He looked at me and said, "Well, Lia has to have the trophy for photo purposes. You can pose with this one, but you have to give it back. You go home empty-handed, and Lia takes the trophy home."

That's what ultimately thrust me into this position of no longer being willing to lie, because that's what they were asking us to do — lie. They were asking us to kindly smile and step



Riley Gaines testifying before the U.S. House Homeland Security Committee on May 16, 2023.

the University of Pennsylvania before deciding to transition to the women's team.

This was a mediocre male swimmer at best, ranking 462nd in the nation among the men. At our national championships in March of last year, that first day of competition, I watched on the side of the pool as Lia Thomas swam to a national title beating Olympians, beating American record holders, and beating the most impressive female swimmers in this country by body lengths. The next day of competition was the 200 freestyle, which was the day that Thomas and I raced each other, and almost impossibly enough, we went the exact same time down to a hundredth of a second.

Upon tying, we go behind the awards' podium where the NCAA official looks at Thomas and me and says, "Great job, but you guys tied, and we only have one trophy, so this trophy goes to Lia. Riley, you go home empty-handed." I ques-

aside and allow a male onto our podiums, taking our scholarships, our titles, our awards, and our trophies, and pretend this was a woman.

I knew the unfair competition was wrong, and what we dealt with in the locker room was wrong. But when they reduced everything I had worked my entire life for down to a photo-op to validate the feelings and the identity of a male, that's when I had had enough. That's when I knew I was willing to do whatever it took to fight to protect women and girls in sports.

**Have you encountered Lia Thomas in the locker room?**

I did at those same national championships. We were not forewarned that we would be sharing a locker room; no one asked for our consent, and we did not give our consent. The only time we became aware that we were sharing this



changing space was when we had to turn around and see a six-foot-four, 22-year-old male, disrobing, dropping his clothes, fully intact and exposing male genitalia, watching other girls undress. It felt like betrayal and belittlement, and it was awkward, embarrassing, and uncomfortable. We all felt it was traumatic. I immediately asked an official, “I want to see the guidelines that allowed someone of the opposite sex into our locker room. What are the rules that allowed this?” He responded, “Oh, we actually got around this by making the locker rooms unisex.”

Any man could have walked into that locker room, and we weren’t told about this. That’s why I say it felt like a betrayal.

It’s been almost a year since this incident happened, and I’ve developed really amazing relationships with Lia Thomas’ teammates who had to undergo this daily. They were gaslit and emotionally blackmailed into silence and made to feel they should apologize for feeling uncomfortable in that locker room. When they sent an email to their administration expressing their discomfort, their administration responded back with, “If you feel uncomfortable seeing male genitalia, here are some counseling resources that you should seek.”

They were forced to go to mandatory LGBTQ education meetings every week to learn about how just by being cisgender, they were oppressing Thomas. They were told, “You will never get a job,” “You will never get into grad school,” “You’ll lose your friends,” and “You’ll lose your scholarship and your playing time if you speak out.” These girls were told, “You can’t take a stance because your school has already taken your stance for you.”

**There are significant biological differences between men and women. Apart from just generally being bigger, there are some significant biological advantages that male athletes have. Is that right?**

Absolutely. And this is something that you don’t even need a fifth-grade under-



**“But when they reduced everything I had worked my entire life for down to a photo-op to validate the feelings and the identity of a male, that’s when I had had enough.”**

standing of biology to recognize. Men are taller, but they have larger lungs and larger hearts. They have, on average, 40 percent larger throats than women. Those will never be changed with hormone suppressants. Men will always have an advantage over women, on average, when it comes to something that requires athleticism or strength.

When you’re competing at the level that I was and when you’re doing everything in your power to shave off merely a few one-hundredths of a second, and you’re competing against someone who has 17 percent greater lung capacity, that makes a huge difference, especially in a sport like swimming where you are starving yourself for oxygen and you need to oxygenate your muscles to continue propelling yourself forward. We know testosterone, height, limb size, hand size, and feet size make a difference, but I think lung capacity and the size of your heart are huge differences that will never be mitigated when comparing males to females.

**How did you get involved in trying to push back against this?**

It was after the trophy scenario that I decided I was going to take a public stance. I called my athletic director at the University of Kentucky, and I told him, “This is what happened, and this is how we feel.” And when I say we, I mean my entire team at the University of Kentucky, which consisted of 40 girls. And I asked him, “How do you feel if I take a public stance in saying that this is wrong?” And he responded back with, “Riley, I love you. I support you. I would support whatever stance you took. Speak

your heart, stay true to your convictions.”

I realize now how naive I was and how grateful I should be to have that kind of support from a university. Because after talking with other girls around the country, my situation is an anomaly. No one else has had that.

Following that, I agreed to do an interview with *The Daily Wire*, which very quickly turned into FOX News and CPAC [Conservative Political Action Conference]. Then I started traveling to college campuses to engage people my age to help them understand my perspective and how we were directly impacted, because I think it’s important that people my age see this.

I was paying out of my own pocket to fly to states to get in front of state legislatures to talk about this, to testify, to do anything in my power that I could to ultimately make a change so no girl or woman has to go through what my teammates and I did. I graduated with a degree in human health sciences and health law, and I had every intention of being in dental school this year, so this is not something I felt equipped for, but I realized what’s at stake if someone doesn’t fight. So, I’ve rerouted my entire life plans and what I thought I was going to do.

**What kind of reception have you gotten?**

I’ve probably been to 20 or so college campuses all over the country, and for the most part, I’ve been well-received. I’ve had people approach it with their minds made up that I was anti-trans, that

I was hateful, and that I was pushing this agenda of trying to eradicate transgenderism. But as they listen to me and realize how I felt and what we went through, they have their minds changed, which is really powerful.

However, I recently went to San Francisco State University — a different environment — not because I was looking for controversy, but because I knew it was an opportunity to change more minds. But the people I spoke with did not come open-minded. I was met with an ambush. I was physically assaulted. I was held for ransom for over three hours, barricaded in a classroom where the protestors were yelling awful, hateful, vengeful, violent things for hours. They were demanding money from me if I wanted to make it home safely. They said it's only fair that I pay them. They felt as if they were owed something

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**“At first, I was heartened by the private support, but it's gotten to the point where it's frustrating; we need more speaking out publicly in support of women and girls.”**

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because they said they had to listen to me sit there and spread violence for the duration of my speech.

It opened my eyes to how unhinged this group of people can be and what they're willing to do to silence you when they know they don't have the truth or common sense or science or logic or reasoning to dissuade from my argument; they resort to violence. I realized that security is a necessity because, up to this point, I had given everyone the benefit of the doubt since in my heart, there is no hate. There's compassion for every single person. But I feared for my life in those moments.

**Did the administration at San Francisco State apologize and try to**

**make it right?**

Absolutely not. They doubled down. They released an email to their student body saying they were proud of their brave students for handling someone who is so abhorrent such as myself, with such bravery and so peacefully.

**You have started reaching out on social media to other well-known women athletes, encouraging them to be outspoken in defense of women's sports as you have been. Talk about that a little bit.**

For the longest time, I had empathy for these people who have sponsorships and coaches who fear losing their jobs. And I could understand because we live in this cancel culture, unfortunately. But I'm realizing that by being silent, that's how we've gotten here. We can no longer accept silence because silence is now an answer, and it means you don't care about women and girls in sports. It's crucial to call on these women who have platforms, who are athletically successful, who have influence over these sport-specific governing bodies to say that they don't want to compete against men, to say it's wrong, that it's unfair for women to have to compete against men, and it's harassment to ask a girl to change in a locker room with a man. We need these strong, powerful women — such as Venus and Serena Williams. Where are you guys? Ronda Rousey and Katie Ledecky. I mean, the list goes on, of course. We need them, and it's time they speak up because their silence is deafening.

**Have some of these women athletes come out in support of women's sports or are they just staying silent?**

Publicly, they're staying silent. I have had people reach out to me privately who don't feel comfortable sharing publicly how they feel, which is a step in the right direction, but that's not enough. They are still being publicly silent. At first, I was heartened by the private support, but it's gotten to the point where it's frustrating; we need more speaking out publicly in support of women and girls. We're really at a crucial time right now where every voice needs to be heard. ★

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# RADICALS AT THE CAPITOL

Despite a razor-thin majority, the DFL pushed through a radical agenda.



John Hinderaker

**Consistent with the view that Minnesota's far-left policies have put our state on the wrong track, Minnesotans have become pessimistic about the state's future.**

Minnesota was the last state to have a split legislature, with each party controlling one chamber. That changed in November 2022, when the DFL retained a slim advantage in the House and eked out a one-vote majority in the Senate, 34-33, winning the decisive seat by only 321 votes. Conventional political wisdom would dictate that a party holding such a slight edge should seek compromise and consensus, but that is not what happened. Instead, the DFL seized the opportunity to enact the most radical legislative package in Minnesota's history, with most of its key measures passing by a single vote.

Minnesota's compliant press has used words like "historic" in describing this year's session. But what do Minnesota voters actually think about it? Our polling, carried out by Meeting Street Insights of Charleston, S.C., indicates they don't like what they saw.

As the 2023 session was ending, we asked Minnesota voters how they evaluate the legislature's work: excellent, good, just fair, or poor? Pollsters often group "excellent" and "good" together as approval, and "just fair" and "poor" together as disapproval. In those terms, only 37 percent of respondents say they approve of the session as a whole, while 58 percent disapprove. And a plurality of 32 percent rated the legislature's performance as "poor."

When we turn to specific issues, most Minnesotans are deeply unhappy with what our legislature has done. This year's tax increases are massively unpopular: 81 percent oppose the increases in car tab fees, 72 percent oppose the tax on retail deliveries, 58 percent oppose the metro sales tax increase, and by 50 percent to 46 percent, Minnesotans oppose the new payroll tax to support paid family leave.

Fully 60 percent of respondents told our pollster that Minnesota's income taxes are too

high, while only three percent thought they were too low. And yet the legislature listened to the three percent fringe and increased Minnesotans' tax burden.

On other issues, too, the legislature went out on a limb. It gave convicted felons the right to vote before their sentences are complete, which Minnesotans oppose 60 percent to 36 percent. It legalized abortion up to and including the moment of birth, a position that only 28 percent say they hold. With much fanfare, Gov. Tim Walz signed into law a measure to make Minnesota a "trans refuge" state where children from around the country can come for sex change operations, even when such a procedure would be illegal where the child lives. But this concept is deeply unpopular with Minnesotans. Only 22 percent say they approve of sex change operations on minors, while 67 percent disapprove.

Consistent with the view that Minnesota's far-left policies have put our state on the wrong track, Minnesotans have become pessimistic about the state's future. Asked whether they believe their children's generation will be better off economically, worse off, or the same as their generation, a shockingly low 14 percent said they expect the next generation of Minnesotans to be better off. And most don't see a future here for their children: 59 percent said it is likely that their children, or the next generation, will move to another state.

Such pessimism is easy to understand in the wake of a legislative session that was deeply misguided in the eyes of most Minnesotans. But the good news is that if you are appalled at what our legislature has done, you are not alone. On the contrary, you are part of Minnesota's majority. It is time to make our voices, and our votes, count. ★

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