MN JOURNAL

Expanding the Civic Imagination

Citizens League
Common ground. Common good.

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The challenges ahead for the next governor

A declining workforce and structural budget deficits require new leadership and governing models

By Bob DeBoer

When Minnesotans go to the polls this fall to elect a governor, they may be voting into office a chief executive who will set the tone and trends of state politics through 2020 and beyond (particularly if that individual serves two terms). There has been an almost mythological quality to discussion of the year 2020, as if it will always remain far in the future so we will never have to face the structural and fiscal challenges that are coming.

According to State Demographer Tom Gillaspy, 2008 to 2011 mark the "entryway into the age of entitlement," particularly for Social Security and Medicare. "We have been making promises to people for 50 years that are now starting to come due," he said.

At the same time, Minnesota is facing a long-term structural budget problem where expenditures are likely to outpace revenue. Minnesota's dependency ratio (i.e., the ratio of the number of people under age 16 and over age 64 to the number of people age 16 to 64) will increase by about a third from 2010 to 2030. We must have solution strategies in place and in operation by 2020 to manage this shift and the pressures it will put on expenditures for health care, education, economic assistance, and social services.

We are already seeing some of these shifts. So it's important for voters to look beyond candidates' capacity to solve today's budget crisis and critically evaluate their ideas and their abilities to address the long-term challenges eating away at our state's economic health.

As Ted Kolderie points out on page 11, the issue for the next governor is not *what* are our challenges, but *how* will we address them. It is insufficient for candidates to simply point out our problems without clearly articulating their strategies to solve them.

At the Citizens League, we see reframing as the key to finding new ideas that lead to significant change. This often requires a thorough reexamination of the values and the incentives at the root of an existing system or behavior. We often find that incentives are not aligned to the outcomes that we as a society have agreed upon. Yet changing those incentives—many entrenched for decades—is no small task. For example, our state has managed pollution control over the past several decades by regulating what comes out of the end of a pipe. We have not built the capacity to address the new challenges associated with nonpoint source pollution.

In managing our water resources, and in other areas, we are beyond the era where government action is always the best solution. Government must either support—or at a minimum not impede—solutions that begin with us, in our roles as policymakers.

Change must begin with each of us. To break through the existing political gridlock, citizens need to reclaim the mantle of policymaker in an era sometimes paralyzed by expertise. We can no longer afford the information milieus and funded policy "silos" that effectively shut so many out of the discussions of our most pressing problems.

Minnesota's next governor will need to lead the way toward innovative policymaking approaches and to truly engage Minnesotans in moving toward sustainable state and local budgets—based on values and agreements that we have reached as Minnesotans.

In this issue of the *Minnesota Journal* we have asked several authors to share their thoughts on how we build on our assets, leverage our strengths, and leapfrog ahead of entrenched interests to reframe, reinvent, and use our capacity and resources more effectively to meet the challenges of 2020.

Bob DeBoer is the Citizens League director of policy development.

INSIDE

As requested, we've added a new section called Engagement on page 3 to keep you informed about Citizens League policy and civic work and all the ways that you can get and stay involved.

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Kathryn Roberts

Kathryn Roberts is CEO and president of Ecumen. She has been a Citizens League member for four years. She is a former board member and former chair of the development committee.

Why she joined:

I have always been interested in public policy and civic engagement. The League offers insight and practice in both areas, so it was perfect for me.

How she practices civic engagement:

Civic engagement is an important activity at Ecumen. As policies and issues emerge that affect the aging, we invite and encourage our staff, residents, and residents' families to have their voices heard with vigor. Our corporate and individual efforts have definitely influenced policymakers in a positive way. Ecumen will continue to grow our own internal "grassroots" civic engagement efforts.

Why she recommends membership in the Citizens League to others:

The League offers an opportunity to meet people with diverse views around complex issues. It also offers the tools to have productive and meaningful conversations that lead to deeper understanding and, hopefully, a stronger appetite to be engaged in civic issues.

SUPPORT THE CITIZENS LEAGUE WITH YOUR KOWALSKI'S RECEIPT

Kowalski's Markets has generously included the Citizens League in their Groceries for Good Causes program. Look for the Citizens League bin at your local Kowalski's, and place your receipt in the bin. Kowalski's will make a contribution to the Citizens League each quarter based on the number of receipts. If you don't see a bin at your local market, please ask the store manager and they will add us as space allows.

BECOME A SUSTAINING MEMBER TODAY

Sign up to have your membership contribution deducted automatically from your credit card each month (until you tell us to stop). Sustaining members help the Citizens League by ensuring a consistent cash flow and reducing postage and processing costs so that more of your membership dollars go toward accomplishing our mission. It's also easier on your budget! Become a sustaining member at any level. Sign up at http://givemn.razoo.com/story/Citizens-League or call us at 651-293-0575.

Thank you to our newest sustaining member, Adam Arling!

Watch your mailbox for the Citizens League annual member survey, arriving the first week of September. We want your feedback! Completing the annual member survey is a great way to let us know how we are doing.

New and rejoining members, contributing organizations, recruiters, and volunteers

Individual members

Kaitlin Andreasen
George Ashenmacher
Bruce C. Barnum
Renae Bartusch
Cecile Bedor
Ellen Benavides
Ann Beuch
Robert Branham
Becky Burand
Lisa Burger
Claudia Carson
James R. Casserly
Jill Catherwood
Carlene Coleman
Ted Davis
Dennis M. Derdoski
Diane M. Derdoski
Rebecca Derdoski
Madeline Dragich
Elizabeth Egan
David Egan
Thomas J. Eggum
Larry Fisher
Colin Frederick
Ed Friedland
Tim Gieseke
Joel Gingery
Andy Grewell
Barb Hall
Valerie Halverson Pace
Jenny Hegland
Coral L. Houle
John Houle
Steve Jepsen
Maerann Jepsen
Alejandra Jusidman
Andrew Keenan
Tracey Kinney
Josh Kinney
Tom Leighton
Matt Lindstrom
J. Trout Lowen
Joan Lynch
Don Lynch
Diane Lyons
Elaine Mayer
Paula Mielke
David Pace
Shaun Palmer
Sue Palmer
Stacy Penk
Elizabeth Perry
Jeff Peterson
Aruna Rao
Sharon Sayles Belton
Jean Scheu
Sue Schway
Ann Sievers
Emily Smolik
Susan Solarz
Soren Sorensen
Matthew Steele
Emily Subialka
Sarah Thimjon
Mark A. Thorson
Kim Vanderwall
Jan Vanderwall
Frank Vondrashek
Julie Warner
Martin Wera
Pam Wheelock
Shannon Wiecks

Firms and organizations

Best Buy
Bigelow Foundation
Blandin Foundation
Capital City Partnership
City of South St. Paul
Community Reinvestment Fund, Inc
Consulate General of Canada
Culligan Water Conditioning Company
Designs for Learning
Ecolab
General Mills Foundation
GovDelivery, Inc
Greater Twin Cities United Way Research & Planning Office
H.B. Fuller Company
Health Partners
League of Minnesota Cities
Lindquist & Vennum
Marquette Financial Companies
Mayo Clinic
Messerli & Kramer
MINCEP Epilepsy Care
Minneapolis Community & Technical College
Minneapolis Foundation
Minneapolis Public Housing Authority
Minnesota Public Radio
Neighborhood House
Northwest Area Foundation
Northeast Bank
Port Authority of the City of St. Paul
Roger Meyer Consulting
St. Paul Area Chamber of Commerce
The Lander Group
The St. Paul Foundation
University of Minnesota Continuing Professional Education
US Bank Foundation
Wellington Management
Wilder Foundation

Recruiters

Steve Dornfeld
Diane Tran
Lee Anderson
Nena Street
Sharon Tennis
Tim Marx
Brian Bell
Amy Hertel

Volunteers

Sheila Graham
Cal Clark

ENGAGEMENT

What We're Doing and How You Can Get Involved

As we begin the next phase of the Citizens League's **Pathways to Prosperity Project**, which will design the details to advance the recommendations of the Phase III committee, we are seeking your input.

- **If you have ideas or examples that can help develop the recommendations, please contact us.**

For more information, read the executive summary or the full working document from Phase III at www.citizensleague.org/prosperity, which summarizes our findings, conclusions, and recommendations to date. We will form a steering committee to oversee design groups and workshops to implement the most promising recommendations.

Earlier this summer, the Citizens League and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources completed 17 successful regional workshops across the state as part of the **Parks & Trails Legacy Project**. We worked with citizens to co-create a vision and identify priorities for the use of parks and trails Legacy fund monies. Roughly 1,000 people from across the state participated, and we hope you will, too.

- **Go to www.citizing.org, sign up for the Parks & Trails Legacy Project and weigh in on a discussion or start a new one.**
- **Participate in upcoming online activities on CitiZing (in design at press time).**
- **Attend one of the follow-up regional meetings this fall. Stay tuned for details, which will be available on CitiZing.**

We are soliciting suggestions for the 2010 Citizens League **annual meeting** this fall. What have you liked about previous annual meetings? What would you like to do or see this year?

- **Send your ideas for the program and event to Catherine Beltmann at cbeltmann@citizensleague.org. Watch the Citizens League website and email newsletter for more information.**

Help the Citizens League reach our end-of-year **membership goal**. We're still looking to add 450 new members by the end of 2010. You can help by:

- **Adding a spouse or housemate to your current membership for free.**
- **Encouraging friends, colleagues, and family to join.**
- **Giving a gift membership—or two or three!**
- **Volunteering to contact people whose memberships have recently lapsed.**

Diana McKeown with author and bicycling enthusiast David Bryne at the June 17th Policy and a Pint®, "Cities, Bicycles, and the Future of Getting Around."

Civic Policy Agenda

The Citizens League is a non-partisan, member-based organization working to build civic imagination and capacity in Minnesota.

The Citizens League's model for policymaking—the civic policy agenda—is based on the belief that all people and organizations have essential roles in developing the ideas, skills, and resources to govern for the common good. Visit www.citizensleague.org/who/identity to find out more.

Current members are pairing with new members to help them navigate their first few months with the Citizens League. Ambassadors offer to attend an event with a new member, help them find opportunities to get involved, and help them answer their questions about the Citizens League.

- **Become an ambassador—contact us to volunteer.**

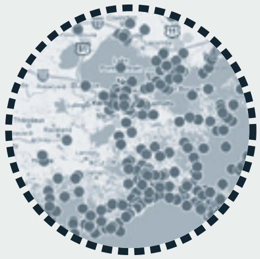
To get involved or find out more about any of these projects, contact Catherine Beltmann at cbeltmann@citizensleague.org or 651-293-0575 ext. 10.

Get more information about all of our work at www.citizensleague.org.

TAKE NOTE

Innovation Spotlight

Mapping the oil spill the open source way



A group of do-it-yourself mappers working with the local nonprofit Louisiana Bucket Brigade is using balloons, kites, and other tools to produce aerial imagery of the areas affected by the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. Inspired by open-source software technologies, the project organizes and trains citizens to use low-cost tools to take high resolution aerial photographs of the oil spill and coastal areas along the Gulf of Mexico that are or are likely to be impacted. The photos are collected online in an open-data repository and are free and available the public. The group is funded by the Center for Future Civic Media at MIT. View the mapping at http://oilspill.labucketbrigade.org.

Open source inventors

The group Twin Cities Makers hosted Make: Day 2010 on Father's Day at the Science Museum of Minnesota to show-off a homemade catapult, a life-size operation game and other fun stuff. The group takes its inspiration from hackerspaces, community-operated spaces where people can come together to work on technology projects. Many of their projects are made possible by open-source hardware, which can be freely modified as long as credit is given to the original designer.

American migration mapped

In 2008, more than 10 million Americans move from one county to another or from one state to another. Recently, Forbes magazine posted an interactive map allowing users to see where we're going and where we've been.

Using data from the IRS, the map allows users to click on any county in the nation and see incoming and outgoing migration patterns, depicted by black and red lines, and track the comings and goings in the nation's largest cities. A few of the trends in population flow: Los Angeles, Miami, and Detroit out; Seattle, Manhattan and Washington D.C. in.

Ding-dong, Solar Sisters calling

Door-to-door selling may remind Americans of the Avon lady, but in Uganda the group Solar Sisters is enlisting women to go door-to-door to sell solar lamps directly to other women. The program targets women because in developing countries they are usually responsible for gathering and purchasing household energy sources, most often coal, wood, kerosene, and gas. These fuels are expensive and cause health problems when burned indoors. Solar Sisters pays for an initial inventory of solar lamps, which come in two models. The larger lamp is capable of charging a cell phone, eliminating the need for trips into town, and lasts up to five years. The women sell to friends, neighbors, and family.

Cutting consumption to keep up with the Joneses

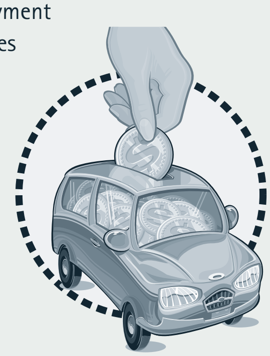
Many messages about saving energy appeal to financial interests or moral beliefs, but is competition a more effective way to get people to change their behavior? Yes, says Robert Cialdini, the author of *Influence*, a best-selling book on persuasion, and chief scientist at OPOWER, a consulting firm that advises utility companies on ways to reduce energy consumption through customer engagement.

In one study reported in *Scientific American*, Cialdini's team went door to door in a San Diego neighborhood and left cards containing one of four different persuasive messages about home energy conservation at each house. Each message offered homeowners a different reason to reduce energy usage: protect the environment, help future generations, save money, and, because the neighbors are already doing it. At the end of the month, Cialdini's team read the home meters and compared the amount of energy used. The only message that had any impact on energy usage was the one about the neighbors. Read more about Cialdini's work here.

Pay-as-you-drive

Auto insurance companies set rates according to a number of factors, including the driver's age, gender, driving record, and place of residence. Most don't base their rates on how much you drive, but could this be a good way to reduce unnecessary driving, asks Good blogger Andrew Price.

Some companies do charge drivers by the mile. These pay-as-you-drive companies check mileage before each payment cycle, and install GPS systems to monitor miles traveled. If it became more widespread, a pay-as-you drive insurance system could result in fewer miles driven, reducing traffic congestion and air pollution.



Take Note compiled by Todd Suomela.

VIEWPOINT

Voices In My Head

Educating Minnesota

Lessons learned from our New Realities in education

by Sean Kershaw

In the amazingly-predictive 1989 book, *The New Realities*, management guru Peter Drucker describes the profound disconnect between the world as we experience it, the "new realities" and the outdated slogans and frameworks that we use to explain it and work within it. When the world around us changes quickly, Drucker writes, "some of the toughest problems we face are those created by the successes of the past."

Education reform is a great example of this disconnect. Our past successes (the Minnesota Miracle and expanded school choice), and our long-time strategy for change focused on legislative action, are getting in the way of addressing the new realities facing schools—and schooling—in Minnesota.

We desperately need education reform and we know it. The outcomes produced by our educational system are insufficient, and we have both a moral and an economic imperative to change this reality. After years of debate and analysis, we even know what types of systems reforms will achieve better results. But knowledge isn't enough. Note the failure of even modest reforms to pass in the 2010 Legislature. Now that we have the *basis* for reform, we need to organize a new base of leaders and institutions to achieve these changes.

THE REAL REALITIES

Adjusted for demographics, our test scores are simply average compared to other states, and below those of our global competitors. Worse, though, is the reality of our educational disparities. This gap between white and non-white student achievement is shameful and it's getting worse. And we now see this education gap translating into a worst-in-the-county gap in income and employment by race and ethnicity.

We need to confront our fiscal realities as well. In 2011, our state will face an unprecedented budget shortfall, and the only way for public education to be held harmless is to grab hold of change. Expecting more money is a political distraction, and it ignores our need for innovation that can increase the value of what we spend now.

There is ample evidence showing which reforms and practices deliver real results: increased achievement for all students. We have district and chartered schools that are getting phenomenal outcomes serving students with a wide range of abilities and backgrounds. Their success comes from both the rigorous application of proven curricula and teaching methods and creative innovations in "schooling." We need more choices in schooling that match the unique learning needs of all kids, not just more public school choice.

We need to change the reality of teaching, too. The failure both to measure and reward our highest-performing teachers, while continuing out-dated practices like "bumping" based on seniority, is decimating the next generation of teachers. We need new models for organizing and rewarding our best educators.

NEW OPPORTUNITIES

"Education can no longer be confined to the schools," Drucker writes. He is right.

We need the imagination and the political will to enact meaningful reform. We need to recognize the opportunities and the roles we have as individuals and institutions to change our educational realities.

First, we need to expand our imagination as to the purpose of public education. Public education is the foundation of a functioning democracy and of a 21st century economy in which all individuals are equally suited to pursue their hopes and dreams. When we blame low-income kids for our educational outcomes we're missing the point: education plays a fundamental role in reducing poverty, developing a productive workforce, stabilizing families, and generating social and economic capital.

If we view education in this larger context, it becomes easier to see how we all have a role in insuring the system's success. We can't just delegate education to formal educators or political leaders. They can't do it alone. Neither can we delegate education representatives who resist change. Leaders in all types of organizations, and at all levels of authority, must work together to build the political infrastructure we need to make these changes real.

We need parents and non-parents to understand that their self-interest is connected to the success of all students. We need employers to play a more active role in the educational lives of their student/parent employees, to throw their considerable support behind education policy reforms, and to use their expertise in innovation to invest in new continuing education for their workforce. Wal-Mart is already doing something like this, partnering with American Public Education to deliver online post-secondary education to their employees.

THE ART OF THE POSSIBLE

Drucker ends his book with an endorsement of our democratic system but he fails to describe what this means.

Ted Kolderie, the former Citizens League executive director and educational entrepreneur, whom Drucker quotes in *New Realities*, offered an insightful observation that can guide us today. In his 2002 "Cold Sunbelt" speech, Kolderie says, "Politics is *not* the 'art of the possible.' ...Politics is the art of making possible what is necessary."

To make real changes in our education system that will achieve the outcomes Minnesota's students and citizens deserve, we need new and better politics that makes possible what we know is necessary. ●

Sean Kershaw is the Citizens League's executive director. He can be reached at skershaw@citizensleague.org, @seankershaw (Twitter), Facebook, or his blog at citizensleague.org/blogs/sean/.

Valuing clean water in a new approach to water governance

Minnesota's current "random acts of conservation" approach fails to address the state's water quality problem

By Tim Gieseke

Minnesota's effort to clean its waters is failing, and its citizens and government staff are questioning the validity of our voluntary approach to water quality management. But before we transform the state's effort into a regulatory regime, a new type of voluntary approach is worth a try. We need an approach that places a value on clean water, targets conservation program funds with greater precision, and generates watershed "intelligence" that tracks our progress.

According to the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) 40 percent of the states waters are impaired due to point-source and nonpoint source pollution. Point-source pollution, the end-of-the-pipe discharges from industry and municipal waste water treatment facilities, is relatively easy to measure and has been regulated since the 1970s.

> To transform the state's voluntary approach we need to view clean water as an economic resource.

Nonpoint source pollution—soil, nutrients, organic matter, and chemicals that wash into waterways during rains or snow melt—comes from both urban and rural landscapes, and it is considered the major cause of water impairments.

Because it's difficult to track nonpoint source pollution, especially from agriculture, Minnesota hasn't used a regulatory approach to address it. Instead, Minnesota uses a model based upon a federal-local government partnership created in the 1930s. This so-called "conservation delivery system" is a voluntary approach that shares the cost of fixing pollution problems with farmers.

Peter Nowak, a professor at the Institute for Environmental Studies of the University of Wisconsin, describes the state's approach as implementing "random acts of conservation." Government staff spend a lot of time and money selling programs to those who volunteer to use conservation practices rather than targeting conservation efforts where they are most needed.

This approach is inefficient and ineffective. Government doesn't have the staff or funding to assess farm needs or identify the most significant threats to every watershed. Without this information, conservation funds can't be targeted effectively.

FARMSCAPE INTELLIGENCE

Without a system to assess farm needs or track progress, farmers and government staff have no way to communicate their needs and progress to each other. I'll use my 100-acre family farm in Nicollet County as an example. We grow corn, soybeans, and pasture for grazing sheep. We currently have two federal government contracts, one for a six-acre native grass stream buffer and the other to provide assistance in crop management related to weed and pest control on 60 acres. These two programs provide water quality benefits, but they are only a small portion of the total water quality benefits we provide on the farm.

Civic Policy Agenda

The Citizens League's 2009 report, *To the Source: Moving Minnesota's Water Governance Upstream*, found that Minnesota is failing to address major water quality issues because our current government-centered approach to pollution control does not fit the nonpoint source pollution problem we face today.

We need a model of water governance in which individuals, business, farms, and communities work together with government toward the goal of clean water, because it is in their own interest to do so.

The index-based system presented in this article offers one possible approach to this new model. By developing farmscape and watershed intelligence, we can provide necessary data and incentives for government, farm, and business stakeholders to work together more effectively towards the goal of clean water.

In the Minnesota River Basin, where our farm lies, the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) is developing a total maximum daily load (TMDL) plan that limits the amount of nonpoint source pollution allowed to flow into river. I asked the MPCA staff how I can determine if our farm management meets the plan's goals. Their response was that I should implement "best management practices" such as no-till farming, stream buffers, nutrient management, or any of the dozens of practices I can choose from. The MPCA staff could not tell me which practice to use or where, or how I would know when my farm had reached its target. Neither could any other local, state, or federal agency staff. Without a farm assessment, there really wasn't a tangible goal to reach. The state's current system is not only plagued by inefficient "random acts of conservation," but a lack of critical scientific data—farmscape intelligence—about which practices work best under what circumstance and the methods needed to measure results.

AN ECONOMIC RESOURCE

To transform the state's voluntary approach we need to view clean water as an economic resource. We need to make clean water the goal instead of reducing nonpoint source pollution. These two approaches may seem like opposite sides of the same coin, but a clean water approach is far more comprehensive; it generates "watershed intelligence," and it focuses on the actual outcome we desire, clean water.

A clean water approach considers *all* of the management of the land, not just the management associated with the government nonpoint source programs. For example, on our farm, using today's voluntary approach, we would calculate the nonpoint source pollution reduction using the six-acre grass buffer strip and the 60 acres of pest management. But that is a small portion of our total effort in providing clean water. The amount of clean water our farm provides is related to our unique soils, topography, crop type and systems, conservation practices, and climate.

We already have the means to make a more comprehensive assessment using management indices developed by the USDA and land grant universities to give farms a "water quality score." Using this scale, our farm could have a water quality score of 82 out of 100. Because farming is dynamic, this score could change yearly with management changes. If I plant more alfalfa, a nitrogen-fixing perennial, instead of corn, my farm's water quality score would go up. If I rent additional farmland next year that has not been managed for clean water, my farm's overall water quality score would go down until I am able to apply new management to the rented land.

Using a farm's clean water score generates new information and opens new channels of communication. If the MPCA and other state agencies decide that a water quality score of 70 meets TMDL plan goals, then farmers could use their current farm score as a starting point and the MPCA target of 70 as their goal.

Farms scoring 55 or less would become the highest priority for conservation programs. No longer would we rely on "random acts of conservation." Farmers, with assistance from their consultants and local agencies, would determine what conservation and crop management changes would be needed to reach a score of 70 or greater.

WATERSHED INTELLIGENCE

In the bigger picture, if we adopt a clean water focus, we can begin to compile farmscape information and, eventually, watershed intelligence. For example, our farm resides in Middle Minnesota, a sub-watershed of the Minnesota River that contains 2,043 farms and 861,886 acres. Over time, say we have assessed 800 farms in the Middle Minnesota watershed and know that 75 percent of those have met a water quality score of 70. A watershed manager could use this data to make a case for Clean Water Legacy funding to target those farms with scores below 70 and to continue assessments on the remaining farms. This is much more targeted than the "random acts of conservation" approach we have today.

Moving from a delivery system focused on nonpoint source pollution programs to one focused on clean water outcomes reverses the role of farmers in the process. Instead of being "conservation customers" of the government system, they become society's "water quality suppliers." The National Association of State Conservation Agencies made a similar recommendation in 2007: reverse the current trend of [government] "program-driven" conservation and move toward a more flexible "resource-driven" [clean water outcomes] system. Because of the daunting challenge of the government agencies assessing the state's 80,000 farms and all of the nation's 2 million farms, this recommendation was immediately shelved.

What was not discussed is how to effectively recruit the thousands of agricultural consultants to assess farm water quality scores. Agricultural consultants are the only professional group besides farmers who have adequate knowledge of the soils, topography, cropping systems, and the farmers' goals, along with an on-the-ground presence. These capabilities allow them to assess water quality scores far more cost effectively than any other group, government or otherwise. Bringing these professionals into the process makes this approach more local and more acceptable. In fact, Minnesota and the nation's governmental agencies will not meet its watershed management goals without them. ●

Tim Gieseke is a Citizens League member, farmer, and founder/president of Ag Resource Strategies, LLC. His book, *EcoCommerce 101: The Emergence of an Invisible Hand to Sustain the Bio-Economy*, will be released this fall. Visit www.agresourcestrategies.com for more information.

State-sponsored water quality assurance

The Livestock Environmental Quality Assurance program, funded by the Clean Water Legacy Act through the Minnesota Department of Agriculture, added a "water quality assurance" component this year to provide livestock farmers with a water quality score. Ag Resource Strategies developed the model, trains technicians, and manages the farm and watershed assessment and assurance data. In late June, a farm in the Cannon River watershed became the first Minnesota farm to receive a state-sponsored "water quality assurance" designation. They achieved a high water quality score with technical help from the local conservation district, funds from state conservation programs, advice from their agronomists, and by accounting for the conservation practices that have been installed and managed on their farm for four decades.

This compilation of efforts and recognition of outcomes represents the economic value of water quality that is provided by this farm. Downstream, businesses, citizens, canoeists, and tubers reap the benefits.

–Tim Gieseke

Passage of the Affordable Care Act makes change possible

Minnesotans want a future where healthy people, health-conscious communities, and a reformed health care system make health care affordable

By Dave Durenberger

There is little doubt that things need to change. Whether it's the $5.8 billion deficit facing our next governor, or the trillions of dollars of debt facing every president beyond Obama. Nobel laureate economist Paul Krugman says it best, "America has a long-run budget problem. Dealing with this problem requires first and foremost a real effort to bring health care costs under control." Having spent 13 months of President Obama's first 14 months in office on health care policy, we don't want to hear he didn't solve Krugman's problem.

Health reform takes a village; more appropriately, perhaps, a community. And a commitment. A state like ours must call out its citizens on our accountability to each other. We are responsible for our own health and that of the community.

The new law would have been better policy had its authors been bipartisan. But it isn't partisan policy. The nation's governors could have been more involved in its design than they chose to be. But the fact that the Affordable Care Act (ACA) is national policy does not make its implementation "top-down" reform policy. Much of the new law is built on policies that have been expressed in legislation over decades, especially since the failure of the Clinton reform effort.

The good news is the ACA has the potential for a health reform Race to the Top that will "bend the cost curve" of health care while improving care quality and access for all. Obama's Race to the Top in education promises financial rewards for innovation. It taps into education reform initiatives that have been talked about for a long time, practiced in a few communities, but never called on to change the way this nation works together to meet global challenges.

Like education, all health care is local and is practiced differently in many parts of this country, with measurably different results. Dr. John E. Wennberg at Dartmouth, who has studied practice variation for many years, says "as early as the 1930s it was evident that local medical opinion was behind remarkable variation in practice."

Much of health care in this country, as in every other nation, is paid for by third-party payers, mainly government or employers. Yet the costs of care in this country are twice the average of all other developed countries. Not because Americans don't have enough financial "skin in the game" as many in the health care industry would have us believe. But because ours is not truly an "American health system" which, like every other industry, would draw on the enterprising talents of the professionals involved by rewarding their value added with money.

There are places in America you can go to see a different, a better, and a less costly future. Hawaii is one, as is the Pacific Northwest and the inter-mountain region. In fact, we live in a multi-state region where that's true. But we have been losing our edge because large public programs like Medicare and many private insurers have maintained payment policies that discourage high-value performance.

The passage of ACA makes possible the kind of future citizens told Governor Pawlenty's 2004 forum on health care costs they believed would reduce health care costs. A future where healthy people, health-conscious communities, and a reformed health care system would make access to health care affordable once again.

LEADERSHIP, REALISM, AND A VILLAGE

Health system reform takes leadership: governors, county commissioners, health professionals and health systems executives, and community and business leaders. Moving to universal coverage in a nation that spends $2.5 trillion so poorly is something worth having a "tea party" over because it provides an incentive to reward low-cost health care. Federal-state programs like Medicaid can expand coverage and reward high-performing states with payments for performance. Health insurance exchanges at the state level and health information exchanges at the regional level, and pilots that encourage medical/health homes, accountable care organizations, capitated or global payment policy, and health management; these are all opportunities.

Everything we need to create a health care system that plays to our strengths has already been invented. Because some of these reform schemes have been tried before does not mean their time hasn't finally come.

Health reform takes realism. System reform is built on behavior change. That means we need to invest some short-term savings into realigning incentives for better behavior in the future. We can't save $5.8 billion over two years without cutting payments to providers whom thousands need for their access. But those who represent communities, states, and regions like ours can have a strong influence on how large public and private programs pay for changed behavior.

Private health insurance reform and Medicare reform are critical to achieving the information and financial incentives we need to stay healthy, to choose wisely, and to reward the health professions for doing the right thing.

Instead of endorsing "skin in the game" approaches to an informed consumer and patient, our leaders can persuade the Congress that must implement ACA to allow Medicare to operate different programs in each of the culturally different regions in the country. These regional Medicare programs can measure and pay for performance and share savings with those whose clinical behaviors change.

Health reform takes a village; more appropriately, perhaps, a community. And a commitment. A state like ours must call out its citizens on our accountability to each other. We are responsible for our own health and that of the community. So many of the social determinants of poor health—lack of family, values, housing, income, and opportunity—require all of us to turn from a reliance on public programs to the social compact and civic engagement.

ALIGN PAYMENTS WITH RESULTS

I reflect on my own experiences since the Citizens League projects in the 1970s that launched the community into employee choice of health plans, health maintenance co-operative organizations, and performance information transparency. Everything we need to create a health care system that plays to our strengths has already been invented. Because some of these reform schemes have been tried before does not mean their time hasn't finally come. We know, for example, that 75 percent of the costs in the system today are caused by medical treatment for chronic illnesses, which we have failed to prevent, delay or reverse. Coordinating care through virtually integrated care systems has worked here, but needs payments aligned with results.

Experts like Dr. Donald Berwick, who has been nominated by President Obama to lead the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), believes as much as 40 percent of current costs are unnecessary. Dr. Wennberg, whose Dartmouth Atlas traces the variation in practice across America, agrees. Much of this is care preferred by physicians who have not informed their patients well as to alternatives and not provided the information needed to facilitate patient choices. Much of it is supply-sensitive care driven for decades by the availability of surgical and diagnostic specialists, hospital beds, and new drugs and devices. Much of the costs are driven by more than 400 "unions" of health professional societies designed to enhance income and reduce patient choices.

Private health insurance reform and Medicare reform are critical to achieving the information and financial incentives we need to stay healthy, to choose wisely, and to reward the health professions for doing the right thing. An insurance market that operates with rules, that creates price and benefit competition, and that reduces premiums over time is a reality whose time has come. And it's coming to our state thanks to the provisions of ACA. Competitive bidding by health plans will provide us true costs in this community while it informs our decisions about new medical technology, new hospitals, and whether to pour more money into the new doctor pipeline or the better deployment of all health professionals.

DEALING WITH LIFE AND DEATH

Minnesotans want to stay healthy as long as possible and would like to see financial rewards encouraging their neighbors to act similarly. Minnesotans know that uncontrollable health care costs make investments in remedying the social causes for poor health difficult. Something as simple as teachers who can teach reading to K-3 students so that learning becomes a passion not a challenge at a very early age can shave off huge costs from the health care, prison, and educational systems in this state. Dr. Wennberg and colleagues at Dartmouth have also informed us of the value of preparing for death and how a medical system can cut the costs of dying by more than 50 percent by reducing unnecessary hospital and ICU admissions and the deployment of over-trained specialists.

The potential is great, the expectations are low, so why not turn optimistic? Minnesota can once again show the way.

David Durenberger is a Citizens League member, former Republican U.S. Senator from Minnesota (1978-1995), and a senior health policy fellow at the University of St. Thomas.

The research university of the future

In an era of scarce funds, can technology-based, active learning strategies that lower costs and improve learning revolutionize higher education?

By William E. (Brit) Kirwan

Editor's note: The following is an excerpt of a speech given by Chancellor William Kirwan of the University System of Maryland at the AAU Public Affairs Network Meeting on March 22, 2010. The first half of the speech outlines the challenges facing higher education in the United States today. The second half, printed here, proposes some solutions. Read the entire speech at http://bit.ly/a2pN0f

First, an observation: at the start of any previous decade in my lifetime, if someone had predicted that universities would operate their education and research programs at the end of the decade more or less like they operated them at the beginning of that decade, they would have been right. But, I am absolutely convinced that such a statement in 2010 will be proved dead wrong in 2020. We are on the cusp of huge change in the way we carry out our educational and research missions, and for that matter our business operations. These changes will be forced on us by the fiscal challenges we face and the intense global research competition and opportunities we will experience. However, they will be much more pronounced in so-called STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) areas than in the Arts and Humanities and the Social Sciences.

Fortunately, there are models out there that demonstrate how technology can be used to both lower the cost of undergraduate education and improve student learning.

I'll expand briefly on these points. First, while our research mission is near and dear to our hearts, we cannot neglect our educational responsibilities. Our nation's competitiveness requires that we significantly increase the proportion of young people getting a college degree. We simply can't be the kind of nation we want our children and grandchildren to inherit if higher education does not step up to this challenge. But, where will the resources be to meet this challenge, you ask? The answer is, they won't be there.

Fortunately, there are models out there that demonstrate how technology can be used to both lower the cost of undergraduate education and improve student learning. Now that is a powerful combination! In this day and age, how can any university resist pursuing such an agenda?

Let me briefly describe two strategies that have produced impressive results. The first is an effort launched by Carol Twigg more than a decade ago. At the time, Carol was a faculty member at the University of Pennsylvania. For several years, she had observed the ineffectiveness and inefficiency of the education delivery models in the multi-section, lower division, general education courses that exist on most of our campuses. In these courses, students are captive participants in a passive learning environment. For the most part, students' dislike of the courses is matched only by the faculty's disdain for teaching them.

Carol concluded there had to be a better way. Armed with a Sloan Foundation grant, she ran a controlled experiment of sorts on 30 campuses: small liberal arts colleges, state flagship universities, and elite private institutions. Each campus had to teach sections of a course using her strategies, which were based on active learning, technology-enhanced online and face-to-face tutorials, and many fewer formal lectures. The institutions also taught sections of the same course using their traditional methods, but all sections took a common final. In every case—at all 30 institutions—the "Twigg" sections scored higher on the finals and had a cost that was the same or lower than that of the traditional sections.

The University System of Maryland hired Carol as a consultant for a three-year period. Under her guidance, each of our campuses developed "Twigg" models in lower division, multi-section courses. We found the same results as in her benchmark study. In all cases, the "Twigg" sections did better and at the same or lower cost than the sections taught using traditional methods.

The Carnegie Mellon example is a similar but even more sophisticated approach. With a grant from Hewlett Packard, Carnegie Mellon has drawn upon the expertise of its cognitive science faculty to develop computer-enhanced learning modules and online tutorials for some of the same category of courses addressed by Carol Twigg. CMU conducted an experiment with its freshman statistics course. Some students took the course in a traditional format; some took the course in the traditional format but using some of the computer-based cognitive learning strategies; and a third group took the course using predominately the computer-based materials, with once-a-week faculty interactions. Interestingly, the third group did the best on the uniform final, the computer-enhanced sections did second best, and the traditional sections the worst.

These are very compelling examples. In an era where there is a scarcity of funds and there are technology-based, active learning strategies that both lower costs and improve learning in lower division courses, can a revolution in how we deliver instruction be far behind?

So, the first way our universities will differ in 2020 is that none of us would recognize today the "classrooms" where students are learning and the means by which instruction is delivered 10 years from now.

There will also be significant changes in where and how research is done in STEM areas. The great centers of research, in these fields, will be much more widely dispersed around the globe. We already see the precursor of this phenomenon with the linear accelerator at CERN. While strong research in particle research will continue to exist in the U.S., many if not most of the real breakthroughs will come by teams, no doubt with U.S. membership, working in Switzerland. But, by 2020, we should expect to see quite a few other centers of cutting edge research elsewhere

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How is the issue

Make schools the unit of improvement and teachers autonomous and accountable to speed up the innovation we need to improve education

By Ted Kolderie

One caution before explaining what Education|Evolving hopes candidates will say about "the issues in K-12 education."

Over the years, campaigns have failed to see "issues" as choices. Politicians and the media covering them point to problems and to goals and describe these as "the issues." The campaigns then consist of deploring problems and proclaiming goals.

And when elected, the winner wonders: How exactly do I get it done?

This confusion has seriously hurt the education-policy discussion. The "learning gap" is a problem, for example. Closing the learning gap surely is a goal. But neither is an issue. Nobody disagrees about either. Where there's no disagreement there's no issue. What's at issue is *how* to close the learning gap.

How is always the issue. It's time in all fields to set the issues as the choices. To ask: Is a given problem (or goal) best addressed by doing X or by doing Y?

In pushing candidates this year to deal with what's centrally at issue in K-12 education, we need to push them to deal with the *how* of change and improvement.

So: What does Education|Evolving, a kind of "design shop" for state education policy and a partnership of Hamline University and the Center for Policy Studies, see as the choices for *how* when it comes to change and improvement? Specifically, why does its new strategy paper, "Innovation-based Systemic Reform: Getting Beyond Traditional School," urge legislators and the Governor to take a "split screen" approach, working two strategies simultaneously?

As to the choices about basic strategy, we see two.

- The mandates strategy uses directives from above in an effort to get better performance from existing schools. The district tells the school, the state tells the districts, and whoever makes national education policy tells the states what standards to meet and, increasingly, what to do. This approach keys on accountability.
- Against that is the incentives strategy. It makes *the school* the unit of improvement. Its central idea is that given the right opportunities and incentives the teachers will adapt schooling to the needs and aptitudes of their students. This approach keys on new schools and on motivation.

Currently, the first strategy dominates. Education|Evolving is arguing for more of the second.

The case for using the school was made most compellingly in "Is the Biggest Challenge Perhaps Right in the Classroom?" (*Minnesota Journal*, November 19, 1999) by Jack Frymier, long in curriculum and instruction at Ohio State University and Phi Delta Kappa.

> *Students learn when they're motivated to learn. Any successful effort to improve learning will be fundamentally about improving students' motivation.*
>
> *Young people differ; in personality, in background and experience, in sociability, creativity, intelligence; in their interests and aptitudes. No effort at motivation will succeed unless it works with these differences.*
>
> *School is not well tuned to the differences among students. Curriculum materials are not often adapted to individuals. Teaching methods are not often varied according to the needs and interests of the individual student. Teachers work mostly with students in groups.*
>
> *Adapting materials and methods to individual student needs is a teachable skill. It just isn't very often taught where teachers are trained. Teachers aren't given much opportunity to modify 'instruction' in this way; are not encouraged to modify the order in which things are taught or how much time is spent on what. Students are not free to pursue a topic that interests them.*
>
> *There are no rewards and few opportunities for teachers trying to modify teaching so that learning becomes interesting to the student and the responsibility of the student. As a result, most academic subjects are not of interest to most students. If it weren't for the extracurriculars, there would be a revolution by young people in school.*

Consider what's at stake in the choice between the two. The mandates strategy is the opposite of making the school the unit of improvement. Telling teachers what to do and how to do it reduces their professional role and makes teaching less likely to attract and hold the kind of people everyone wants in teaching.

The strategy of making the school the unit of improvement enlarges the professional role of teachers, makes teaching a better job and so motivates teachers.

If the state expands its effort to make the school the unit of improvement, teachers in autonomous—and accountable—schools would be able to innovate and to improve in three areas:

- The traditional *how* of learning has been courses and classes; adults instructing young people in groups. Schools in which teachers set the approach to learning might personalize learning. Students might work at their own pace and perhaps learn by doing projects.
- The traditional how of school organization has been the pyramid: an administrator at the top with teachers working for that principal. Where authority rests with the teachers they might instead organize as a partnership like other professionals, making as a group the tough decisions about performance, assignment, accountability, even compensation. They might share the administrative work or have an administrator working for them.

- The traditional notion of achievement is academic: content knowledge and skills. Testing is the focus for conventional accountability. But parents (and society) do have other objectives for young people: character, responsibility, critical and creative thinking, and the ability to work in teams. An empowered school might well use this broader definition.

We want to be clear. In urging legislators and the governor to give new schools the lead role in improvement, Education|Evolving is suggesting that this effort *be added* to the ongoing effort to improve existing schools.

We want to be clear. In urging legislators and the governor to give new schools the lead role in improvement, Education|Evolving is suggesting that this effort *be added* to the ongoing effort to improve existing schools.

This raises an even more fundamental issue about how to change and improve: the choice between using only one strategy for change and using multiple strategies.

Traditionally, education policy has looked for "one best way." Change has meant everybody changing. The trouble is that people —reasonably—disagree about the "right way." The result is paralysis: The more sweeping the proposals for change the less K-12 actually changes. Mandates are not a very successful *how*.

When in doubt, the old wisdom says, hedge the bet. So Education|Evolving suggests candidates say: "The hell with waiting for consensus. I want action. So I support a "split screen" strategy. I want teachers looking for what works better."

In most systems, innovation *is* the process for change. Somebody offers some new product or process. The early-adopters pick it up. Most people at first do not. Over time, more do. Gradually the new replaces the old. Tractors replace horses; computers replace typewriters; digital TV replaces analog. When change is voluntary, change proceeds faster and with less conflict.

In 2011, this approach means just to empower new schools in which change and improvement is something teachers do.

Our legislature started this direction in 1991 with chartering. Chartering, says Allan Odden of the University of Wisconsin, is "America's principal experiment with school-based decision making." The state took another step in 2009 with "site-governed schools." This legislation now gives charter-like authority to district schools in which teachers remain in union membership.

So how do we speed improvement in K-12? Increasingly, we need to make the school the unit of improvement. Increase the authority of the people who know the students as individuals. Put the accountability in the school, too. Authority and accountability *have* to be combined. Where, if not at the school? ●

Ted Kolderie is senior associate for Education|Evolving and former executive director of the Citizens League.

Research university

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in Europe and in Asia. Going back to Rick Levin's talk, we can get a glimpse of the transformation under way. He pointed out that Yale has a strong research partnership in the biosciences with a Chinese university and that Yale has found some competitive edge in sending researchers there rather than having them come to New Haven. The reason is that the cost of doing the research is lower, the facilities are superb, and there are plenty of talented graduate students.

I also believe we will see fewer research universities in the U.S. by 2020, and a narrower portfolio of research activities at our major research universities. While there may be a few exceptions, I don't believe universities will be able to aspire to "excellence across the board" in research. The funds simply won't be there to maintain competitive research programs in a wide swath of areas when the competition isn't just 50 or 60 other U.S. universities, but three or four times that number spread around the globe.

Another challenge for our research universities will be attracting adequate numbers of talented graduate students. Foreign graduate students already dominate many of our best science and engineering programs. While numbers have declined slightly, our universities are still seen as offering the best graduate education opportunities and we have had our pick of exceptional students. This has been our salvation since U.S. colleges and universities are not producing enough domestic science and engineering graduates to fill the need in our graduate programs. We certainly cannot count on this flow of foreign students in the coming years as strong research centers evolve in other parts of the world. We must start now to build the pipeline of well-educated and motivated domestic students in STEM areas or face the prospect of a significant shortfall in graduate students, who are absolutely essential to maintaining excellent research programs.

Perhaps all of this sounds a bit alarmist and depressing. But, there are positive aspects to this scenario as well. The kind of global expansion of knowledge creation that seems inevitable, will almost certainly lead to significant improvements in the standard of living and the quality of life around the world. And, while we may have to share more of the limelight on breakthrough research discoveries, the competition and collaboration on a broader scale will undoubtedly accelerate advances and make us better at what we do. ●

William E. (Brit) Kirwan is Chancellor of the University System of Maryland.

The solution to the long-term care crisis begins with you and me

If we change the way we think about and plan for aging and end-of-life, public policy will follow

By Britta Orr

At this point we have all heard the statistics. We have been inundated with facts indicating that the "age wave" has begun to crest and will soon be thundering upon the shores of our economy and our personal lives. It is no secret that starting in 2011 the baby boom generation will begin to reach age 65, and over time the need for long-term care services will skyrocket.

Despite all that we know, I think it is fair to say that people my age (members of the millennial generation) have trouble planning for the time when their parents might need help with activities of daily living such as bathing, dressing, transferring, and eating. They certainly can't imagine a day when *they* will need this level of help. After all, aging and dying is difficult stuff. It's hard to think about, let alone scrutinize in meaningful conversation.

> Given the extent of the impending long-term care crisis, it's hard to imagine an easy solution. And I think that's part of the problem. We have come to expect—or at least want—painless solutions.

That's why I'm convinced long-term care will be one of the most complicated financial and social issues facing Minnesota and the nation over the next 20 years. There is no doubt Minnesota needs a forward-thinking governor to tackle this issue in 2010 and beyond, but as citizens we must prepare to play an equally vital role.

In the United States there is a growing gap between our rapidly aging population and the resources needed to sustain its well being. For example, life expectancy has increased from 68.2 years in 1950 to 77.5 years in 2003—and it continues to rise. Despite living longer, many older Americans are experiencing a greater prevalence of chronic conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, cancer, kidney or liver disease, and various cognitive impairments. At the state level, Minnesota will have more retirees than school age children by 2020 and by 2030 more than 20 percent of the population will be age 65 and older. By 2050, Minnesotans over age 85 will number nearly 325,000—tripling in less than 50 years.

It seems like almost everyone has a close friend, coworker, or acquaintance who is juggling care needs for an elderly relative—whether an in-home spouse, a parent with a recent hip fracture, or a grandparent battling Alzheimer's. Nearly 600,000 Minnesota families are providing in-home care valued at more than $7 billion each year. In general, 92 percent of care needed by the elderly is provided by family caregivers—almost two-thirds of whom are working.

Given the extent of the impending long-term care crisis, it's hard to imagine an easy solution. I think that's part of the problem. We have come to expect—or at least want—painless solutions. On the contrary, like so many of America's health problems, long-term care is best addressed through awareness, education, and culture change.

More specifically, I believe we need to integrate eldercare into our work and home lives in a way that is thoroughly supported by public perception. We need to get beyond the time when discussing the end-of-life or nursing care is taboo, and we need to get creative about how to help seniors meet health care and other goals. Why not follow the lead in Europe where older individuals are more actively integrated into the community structure and are a vibrant part of economic and social life? Why not make this happen at an individual level and let policy follow? It seems to me it's the grassroots organizing that is lacking around this issue. Those most affected—the elderly—are the least able to advocate for change, so it's time for families, communities, and businesses to step up.

As families, we can begin to talk to our loved ones earlier about their desires for long-term care. As communities, we can lend a hand to friends and neighbors who are so busy providing care that they can't find time to mow the lawn or buy the groceries. As businesses, we can provide flexible work schedules and supportive environments to those who need it. Individuals must also step up before their personal need for care arises. We need to begin taking seriously the link between our own behaviors and the onset of chronic illness and disability since preventing some of the most costly disabilities in later life can be as simple as eating right, exercising, and limiting stress over time.

Many in the world of long-term care highlight the need for shared responsibility—a level of investment from private citizens and government alike. I would argue this must start with you and me. It must start with an open and honest dialogue about the struggles of caring for our aging parents and grandparents. It must start with an understanding that the end-of-life is not a taboo subject—nor is growing old. It must be deeply rooted in respect for those who need long-term care and an acknowledgment that we will all be there one day, which makes this an inherently universal concern.

As the next governor heads into office, he or she will undoubtedly need to address long-term care from a policy standpoint. However, rather than waiting for our political leaders to deliver a solution, let's embrace our role as part of the solution. Let's first reinvigorate our own commitment to support an aging population. Let's provide community assistance for our elders and those who struggle to care for them. Let's change our mindset as we run businesses and nurture families. Let's start taking better care of ourselves and our health before it is too late. Politicians will get the hint. ●

Britta Orr is a Citizens League member and policy analyst in public health at the Minnesota Medical Association. She is a 2009 graduate of the University of Minnesota Law School and is currently working on a master's degree in public health.

Ending the transit wars

Modal protectionism does little to advance the overall goal of building a better, more efficient transit system

By Ferrol Robinson

Too often transit advocates engage in what can be described as "modal protectionism," arguing that light rail transit, bus rapid transit, personal rapid transit, or traditional buses are superior or more desirable than the other transit modes. While a particular transit mode may be objectively better than others for some applications, modal protectionism is more likely driven by other things: competition for scarce funding or even personal preference. Whatever the reason, modal protectionism can lead to selecting modes that are not the most appropriate for solving specific transportation problems. Advocates for different modes need to come together to build a more efficient transit system that does a better job of overcoming current obstacles to transit use.

Two key points should be made at the outset: First, there is no inherently "best" transit mode. There may be a best mode(s) for specific transit service applications and conditions and for achieving stated objectives. Second, it is not appropriate or relevant to compare line-haul express applications such as light rail transit (LRT) or bus rapid transit (BRT) to short-haul applications such as personal rapid transit (PRT) or shuttle buses.

Transit advocates should collaborate, not compete, to eliminate barriers to transit use and growth, and to reduce over-dependence on automobiles, which in turn would reduce congestion, delays, emissions, and fuel consumption.

ENDING TRANSIT WARS

While transit advocates fight over dwindling funds or for their favorite mode, we continue to spend most of our money on auto travel, which is the root cause of congestion and the least "green" transportation option, and on highways, which are getting more and more congested. Transit advocates should collaborate, not compete, to eliminate barriers to transit use and growth, and to reduce over-dependence on automobiles, which in turn would reduce congestion, delays, emissions, and fuel consumption.

Transit advocates also need to focus on getting the most out of diminishing transit funds. As Ken Orski reports in his newsletter devoted to transportation issues, last May, Federal Transit Administrator Peter Rogoff told an audience of leading transit general managers at a national summit:

"At times like this, it is more important than ever to have the courage to ask a hard question: If you can't afford to operate the system you have, why does it make sense for us to partner in your expansion? If you can't afford your current footprint, does expanding that underfunded footprint really advance the...goal for cutting oil use and greenhouses gases...?"

Rogoff cited preliminary results of a Federal Transit Administration (FTA) study of the financial needs of 690 public transit systems across America. The study found a $78 billion backlog of deferred maintenance and 29 percent of all transit assets in poor or marginal condition.

OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

Most current transit systems suffer from multiple limitations that create barriers to their use and growth, including:

The "first-mile" service gap. Line-haul transit service options, primarily LRT, BRT, and express bus service serve a relatively narrow travel shed surrounding stations (a little over a quarter-mile radius) typically accessed by walking and bicycling. To increase this shed, transit operators rely on feeder buses and park-and-ride. In this respect, three impediments need to be addressed:

- Stations need to be no more than half-mile apart to facilitate walk access; however, this reduces service speeds.
- Feeder buses need to run every 15 to 20 minutes to entice drivers to use transit, but this level of frequency is costly.
- Park-and-ride access is important, but locating park-and-ride lots or ramps close-in is difficult due to neighborhood opposition and high land values.

The "last-mile" service gap. Transit users need to be able to get to work, shopping, or other locations once they arrive at their destination (say, in downtown areas), but many stations are too far away from these destinations.

Mobility versus access. Transit systems must balance service speed (mobility) against ease of access. If access becomes more desirable, mobility suffers. To overcome this, mobility can be improved by reducing dwell times at stations (through fare prepayment, level-floor access, multiple doors, etc.) and by reducing slow-downs and stops (through queue-jumping, signal priority, etc.).

Service flexibility. Service flexibility is the ability of a transit mode to adapt to changes in demand patterns due to changes in the characteristics of the population (such as age and income) or development density. Transit systems such as LRT and BRT that operate on exclusive fixed rail or roads are considered relatively "inflexible" by virtue of their design: farther-away patrons must find their way to stations by their own means or by means provided by others. Because BRT buses are able to leave or enter the exclusive route at certain points, BRT is considered more flexible than LRT.

High level of access, mobility, and service coverage are key service attributes that, ultimately, will help transit become more competitive with automobiles. This is why greater collaboration between transit on exclusive routes (LRT, BRT) and circulation-distribution transit (shuttle/feeder buses, PRT) is essential.

PRT is still the new transit kid on the block but there is enough research to show that PRT is well suited to fill many gaps in traditional transit systems. PRT can pick up and distribute transit passengers at their destination, or shuttle them to and from stations or park-and-ride facilities. PRT can operate at high speeds (20-25 miles per hour) and its design is flexible and expandable. Fully automated, PRT does not run in mixed traffic, and stations are "off line" so it does not interfere with "through" vehicles at stations. Furthermore, PRT can help compensate for gaps in service from widely-spaced LRT and BRT stations, functioning as an extension to fixed routes.

GOING FORWARD

There are a number of steps we can take going forward to end transit wars and to create a more integrated and better-functioning transit network.

Greater modal collaboration is the first step needed to reduce obstacles to transit use, to increase transit efficiency and success, and to make transit more competitive with automobiles.

The 2007 Urban Partnership Agreement (UPA) federal grant program offers an excellent example of multimodal partnership and collaboration in pursuit of common transportation objectives. Under the UPA, metropolitan transportation agencies, organizations, and city and county governments were encouraged to form partnerships to advance four kinds of transportation improvements: road pricing, transit, telecommuting, and the technology to support them. The UPA provided incentives for the Twin Cities community to form partnerships to identity and implement, in a short timeframe, dozens of multimodal, complementary transportation projects aimed at reducing congestion.

Another important and innovative element of the UPA was the required inclusion of road pricing in the mix of congestion-reduction projects. Pricing reduces auto use and congestion and promotes transit use. The UPA grant money made the expansion of high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes on I-35W to high occupancy toll (HOT) lanes.

One important factor moving forward will be the ability and willingness of transit advocates to identify and implement win-win situations. One example of win-win collaboration would combine the strengths of BRT with the benefits of road pricing to reduce long-term congestion and enhance transit service. Under this concept, transit and highway agencies join forces to build exclusive BRT facilities on highways, and allow autos, including carpools and light trucks, to use the excess capacity on the BRT facility for a fee. A unique aspect of this partnership is that revenues from both fares and tolls are used by the agencies to cover the costs of operating the toll system as well as BRT operations.

A final ingredient for advancing regional transit and transportation objectives is political leadership. Policymakers and political leaders need to challenge themselves as well as modal advocates by articulating innovative ideas and policies for guiding the evolution of transportation in the region, including:

- Policies that promote the formation of multimodal partnerships, backed by a competitive funding mechanism that rewards innovation and creativity for implementing mutually-supportive, worthy transportation projects.
- Policies and principles for guiding decisions regarding major transit investment options. Among these is the need to balance access, mobility, and service coverage when selecting a preferred transit option; and evaluating the level of success of transit implementations using outcome-based performance measures.
- Policies that support the use of technology to enhance transit user safety, provide real-time transit information, and improve transit flow, travel times, and travel time reliability.

Only by putting an end to transit wars and creating innovative, collaborative solutions to the transportation challenges that lie ahead can the region hope to achieve its transportation and transit goals, especially given the reality of scarce and diminishing funds for transportation in the future.

Ferrol Robinson is a research fellow at the State and Local Policy Program, at the University of Minnesota's Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs and a member of the Transportation Research Board's Congestion Pricing Outreach Committee.

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For more ways to get involved, see page 3.

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