



JOURNAL

Expanding the Civic Imagination

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League**
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Reformulating citizenship and policy-making

Conclusions from the Minnesota Anniversary Project (MAP 150)

By Stacy Becker

As Minnesota neared its 150th anniversary as a state in 2008, many Citizens League members were questioning why our state, once a model for progress and innovation on public issues, had sputtered to a stalemate on many important public problems. As we have written often in this publication over the past two years, the Citizens League's response to that question was the Minnesota Anniversary Project, MAP 150. The original intent of MAP 150 was to have citizens help us identify some key policy areas to tackle, and then to run these through a version of the Citizens League's renowned study group process. But along the way, our interactions with Minnesotans suggested a fundamentally different approach.

In fact, the more attention the Citizens League paid to citizens, the more we began to see how citizens could be instrumental in solving our state's policy problems. Think about today's highly complicated public policy problems as a jigsaw puzzle where the pieces are the diverse assortment of data, facts, experiences, values, and choices relevant to any specific policy topic. The puzzle cannot be solved if important pieces are missing—including those held by citizens. But how often do we recognize that citizens hold valuable puzzle pieces?

In order to solve today's vexing problems we must re-imagine how citizens, government, and other institutions interact with each other. It turns out that the supposed "apathy" or "ignorance" often attributed to citizens may actually be a product of poorly designed and executed citizen involvement practices. Through

MAP 150 we have learned that people do not get involved because they believe that citizen involvement processes are often a waste of time. We have also learned that citizens and public officials are "watching different

movies" when it comes to evaluating what takes place in citizen involvement processes. Most important, we have seen the benefits of genuine processes that give citizens a meaningful place at the table. What we suspect but cannot prove is that MAP 150-type processes, which build civic capacity and introduce fresh perspectives into old debates, will provide the launching point for the serious reforms needed in our public systems, from transportation to education to health care and beyond.

THE LESSONS OF MAP 150

This article presents a few of the primary conclusions drawn from MAP 150. The full report can be found at www.map150.org. The conclusions were drawn from a variety of sources, all part of MAP 150, including video-taped interviews, a statewide, scientific

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CONNECTIONS

Building a League of Citizens

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

You may have noticed some new (and some not quite so new) faces around the Citizens League office and at events this summer. Anna R. Schumacher and Julia Mayorquin are participating in the summer internship program. Dani Fisher and Sandy'Ci Moua joined the Citizens League staff in the spring. We've asked each of them to share some of their background and tell us something unexpected about themselves.

DANI FISHER

Dani Fisher joined the Citizens League in April as development manager. She is responsible for developing and leading the implementation of a comprehensive fundraising program.

Before coming to the Citizens League, Dani spent two years working toward a master's degree in public policy with a concentration in nonprofit management and governance at the Hubert H. Humphrey Institute at the University of Minnesota. From 1999 to 2008, Dani was a regional political director and area director for the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, a national membership-based advocacy organization.

Dani has a bachelor's degree in political science and international relations from the University of California at San Diego. She serves on the strategic planning committee of her synagogue and on the families with young children subgroup of the Minneapolis Jewish Planning Commission.



SANDY'CI MOUA

Sandy'Ci Moua joined the Citizens League in May as an administrative assistant. Sandy processes and updates membership renewals, manages and updates the database, functions as an events/meeting planning team member, and performs specific communications and administrative tasks.

Sandy has more than 10 years of nonprofit experience in youth service, community organizing, administration, event planning, and website/newsletter communications, focusing on immigrant and refugee communities of color.

Some of her current interests are promoting ROWE (results-only-work-environment), social networking media, and Hmong American philanthropic fundraising and donor development.



ANNA R. SCHUMACHER

Anna Schumacher is working on the poverty project this summer. She is interning as a part of the John Brandl Scholarship from the McCarthy Center for Public Policy at the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University. Last summer Anna completed an internship as a Jackson Civic Engagement Fellow at Minnesota Campus Compact. She has also interned at Sertich Consulting, based in Chisholm, Minn., and worked on higher education and rural development projects.

In May, Anna finished her third year as an economics major at the College of Saint Benedict. Fall semester of 2008 she studied abroad in Viña del Mar, Chile.



JULIA MAYORQUIN

Julia Mayorquin is working on immigration and higher education issues, including communicating and advancing the Citizens League's recommendations on immigrant students and higher education.



Julia attends North Hennepin Community College. She is working on an associate's degree and plans to transfer to a four year college or university. Julia is part of the NAVIGATE program that helps immigrant students access higher education, jobs, and legal status.

For more than five years, Julia has been active in St. John the Evangelist church in Hopkins where she is a volunteer Sunday school teacher and secretary of her youth group. She values her family, education, and serving others.

New and rejoining members, recruiters, and volunteers

Individual members

Adam Axvig
Keira Drainsky
Carl Erickson
Caroline Fahrney Kirchner
James Field
David Fisher
Susan Gray
Allison Hawley
Garry Hesser
Elizabeth A Hjelm
Nichole Holstein
Nancy Homans
Michelle Kimbrough

David Kirchner
Ruthanne Kurth-Schai
Abigail Mackenzie
John Manning
Daryn Mc Beth
Sylvia Nickel
Jean O'Connell
John O'Connell
Noel Peterson
Dave Powell
Kelly Rowan
David Simon
Marla Stack
Dominick Washington
Daniel Wolter

Debbie Zellner
Kevin Zellner

Firms and organizations

Advance Consulting
City Academy Charter School
Courage Center
Duckor & Associates
Ecumen
Family Housing Fund
General Mills
Greater Twin Cities
United Way Research and Planning Office

John G. Hoeschler, PA
Lifeworks Services Inc
Lincoln Institute of Land Policy
Lutheran Social Services of MN
Marquette Financial Companies
Mayo Clinic
Medtronic Foundation
Messerli and Kramer
MINCEP Epilepsy Care
Minnesota Public Radio
MN Women's Economic Roundtable

National Association of Industrial & Office Properties
Neighborhood House
Northeast Bank
Office of the Legislative Auditor
Presbyterian Homes & Services
Public Financial Management
RBC Foundation
Robert Vanasek and Associates
Saint Paul Area Chamber of Commerce

St. Jude Medical
The Harrington Company
The Whitney Foundation
Wilder Foundation

Recruiters

Amy Filice
Richard Hendrickson
Sheila Kiscaden
Nena Street

Volunteer

Sheila Graham

The Comcast Foundation has provided a generous three-year grant to help increase the involvement of young adults in the Citizens League. Our new Action Groups, StudentsSpeakOut.org, and our civic leadership programs have been made possible, in part, with Comcast's support since 2006.





The future is *how*

What health care reform can tell us about making better public policy

by Sean Kershaw

"Each system is perfectly designed to achieve the results it gets."

—Charles Homer, Harvard School of Public Health

If Charles Homer is right, and I believe he is, then we won't get better outcomes unless we change *the way* we make public policy. And, if the results of the past legislative session offer any evidence, our system of policy-making desperately needs to change.

The future of public policy is no longer just about government. It is about constructing a new policy model that addresses the issues of governance inside all institutions: the way that we motivate individuals and institutions and produce results that benefit the common good.

The future is *how*.

Our current system casts us in the roles of individual and institutional victims of bad policy processes. A better system assumes all individuals and institutions have the capacity to produce public policy. At the Citizens League, we call this a "civic policy agenda."

An article on health reform by Atul Gawande in the *New Yorker* in June offers a great example of how we can make the transition to this new (civic) policy model.

A TALE OF TWO SYSTEMS

Gawande examines medical services in two Texas cities, McAllen and El Paso, and compares them to our own Mayo Clinic in Rochester. Both Texas cities have similar demographics and similarly poor health outcomes. But McAllen, the second most expensive Medicare market in the country, spends more than \$15,000 per enrollee. El Paso spends just over \$7,000 per enrollee. Gawande contrasts these communities with Rochester and the Mayo Clinic, which spends slightly less than El Paso and achieves dramatically better health outcomes than either Texas city. Gawande approaches these disparities like a detective, interviewing the players in each community

to get at the root of the difference and examining what the answer could mean for reforming our entire medical service system.

Gawande concludes that our current system rewards overuse of expensive—and profitable—medical services and penalizes practices that reduce cost and improve outcomes. McAllen isn't an exception—an outlier on the chart of our medical services systems—but the logical outcome of our current policy processes.

A NEW CIVIC MODEL

So how do we transfer the lessons from Rochester and Mayo to the larger arena of public policy? Four factors stand out as essential building blocks for any new system, as the "how" of a better civic policy agenda.

All institutions matter. Institutions structure the use of resources in society. Institutions are *where* policy happens. Gawande points out that in each community an anchor institution becomes the role model for the practice of medicine, producing leaders and setting the norms and rules that determine the cost and quality outcomes for that community. The Mayo Clinic clearly set the course for low-cost, high-quality outcomes in Rochester. McAllen's for-profit, doctor-owned specialty hospitals put them on the opposite path.

Civic public policy must provide incentives for *all* institutions to play their part in producing better public policy outcomes.

Collaboration matters. Whether it is collaboration between sectors and institutions in society, or between skill sets and roles within an institution, collaboration brings together expertise and problem-solving skills. McAllen's doctors compete for patients and are rewarded for volume. At Mayo, all staff, including doctors and nurses, work on salary as a team to improve care quality, and they achieve lower costs as a byproduct.

A new civic policy model would provide incentives for individuals to work across

sectors and areas of expertise on common problems and opportunities and allow people who are impacted by a problem help to define it.

Leadership matters. Institutions need to build their capacity to develop and reward leadership and accountability within this new collaborative framework. Gawande's article points out that in most medical communities there is no one in charge—"the system has no brakes" on cost or quality. "The lesson of high-quality, low-cost communities is that someone has to be accountable for the totality of care," Gawande writes. He suggests that the local medical communities are the only ones who have proven that they can produce the outcomes we demand.

We must develop and support the civic leaders in all sectors and institutions who have the capacity to lead the change we need.

Values matter. If policy is fundamentally about governance, then civic values need to be at the heart of policy-making. There is a set of values embedded within every decision and every policy directive. At Mayo, "the needs of the patient come first." In McAllen, making things convenient for doctors and maximizing revenue are the prevailing values, Gawande concludes.

We need to make sure fundamental civic values, such as expanding human capacity, democracy, and political competence, are at the core of every institution and individual.

OUR CHOICE

We have a choice—and an opportunity—to establish a better "how" in public policy. It's time for us to transfer what we've learned from institutions like Mayo and communities like Rochester, not just to improve the delivery of health care, but to create healthier civic institutions everywhere. ●

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

TAKE NOTE

Innovation Spotlight

TAKING A CHANCE ON GAMBLING

Facing large unanticipated deficits, commissioners at Miami International Airport are looking to bored, idle passengers for a new source of revenue. In early July, the Miami Dade Airport Commission voted to apply for a permit that would allow them to seek a state license to put slot machines in the airport, the *Miami Herald* reported. County Manager George Burgess estimates slot machines inside the airport's secured areas could raise as much as \$17 million a year. But that's still far short of the amount of revenue the airport will need to make up future shortfalls.

MIA's annual operating cost is currently \$600 million a year, but is expected to skyrocket to \$1.1 billion by 2015 because of debt associated with airport construction and rising operating costs, Burgess said.

Commissioners say they aren't sure if they will pursue the slot machine license, but given the financial situation, they want to preserve their options before final approval of the gaming compact between the state and the Seminole Tribe of Florida.



NYC'S PEDESTRIAN PLAZAS PAY OFF

When New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg proposed closing portions of Broadway to traffic last winter, the move was touted as a way to ease congestion. What the mayor didn't mention was the city's plans to turn its new pedestrian plazas into new sources of revenue.

The plaza's can be rented individually or as a group by private companies and organizations for events and promotions. Rent for the plazas, located at Times Square, Herald Square and the intersection of Broadway and Fifth Avenue, ranges from \$200 per day for a small event to as much as \$38,500 for a large event that requires big tents or street closings, according to the *New York Times*.

Since May, the city has received 28 requests for the pedestrian plazas and granted 20 of them. The plazas have been used for promotions by Glidden Paint, the Bravo TV series "Top Chef," and "The Great Debate" series on VH-1. The city has also granted permits for yoga and martial art classes and a woodwind performance, the Times reported. The money goes to the city's general fund.



LESS GAS, LESS GLOBAL WARMING

Dairy farmers in Vermont are looking to do their part to curb global warming by changing their grain feed to a mixture that produces less belching among their herds, the *New York Times* reported. Cows fed a tradition mix of corn or soy belch methane, considered the second-most-significant heat-trapping emission linked to global



warming after carbon dioxide. According to a researcher at University of California-Davis, the average cow expels between 200 and 400 pounds of methane per year.

Since January, 15 Vermont dairy farms have adjusted their grain feed mix to include more alfalfa and flaxseed, which mimic the spring grasses that cows used to eat. The change seems to be working. As of mid-May, one farmer had reported an 18 percent drop in the amount of methane emitted by his herd and no drop in milk production. The herd is healthier, too, he said.

REGISTER EVERY VOTER

The United States lags far behind many other democracies in efforts to register all of the country's eligible voters, according to a new report released by the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University. "*Expanding Democracy: Voter Registration Around the World*," takes a detailed look at voter registration systems in the United States and sixteen other democracies and finds the U.S. system is "costly, inefficient, and insufficiently accurate."

"The United States is one of few democratic nations that place the entire burden of registering to vote on individual citizens," the authors point out. As a result, 50 to 65 million Americans—one-quarter to one-third of all eligible voters—remain unregistered and unable to cast ballots.

Countries in which the government plays a bigger role in voter registration have significantly higher registration rates, including countries with similar systems. Canada's federal voter roll includes 93 percent of all eligible voters. France, Great Britain, Australia, and Mexico all have registration rates between 90 and 96 percent, according to the report. The U.S. ranks lowest among the sixteen countries and four Canadian provinces included in the report, at 68 percent.

Voter Registration Rates

Argentina (2007) 100%	Belgium (2007) 94%	Burundi (2005) 91%
Belize (2008) 97%	Indonesia (2004) 94%	France (2007) 91%
Saskatchewan* (2008) 97%	Ontario* (2008) 94%	British Columbia* (2008) 90%
Great Britain (2008) 97%	Austria (2008) 93%	South Africa (2009) 77%
Mexico (2005) 95%	Canada (2008) 93%	Bahamas (2007) 75%
Peru (2006) 95%	Germany (2005) 93%	United States+ (2006) 68%
Sweden (2006) 95%	Australia (2008) 92%	
	Québec* (2008) 92%	

* These jurisdictions are Canadian provinces. + Citizen voting age population used.

One feature that countries with higher registration rates share is "carefully regulated data sharing between government agencies." In France, the names of 18-year-olds who sign up for mandatory military service are automatically forwarded to local elections officials. In Argentina, the agency responsible for issuing national ID cards shares information with the country's local election officials. Names are added automatically to the voter rolls at age 18.

For more information or to read the report, go to www.brennancenter.org and click on the "Voting Rights & Elections" tab.



Looking backward and forward at the U.S. Senate recount

Minnesota's election procedures are among the best in the nation, but a few adjustments could make them even better

by Joseph Mansky

Most Minnesotans are familiar with the basic facts surrounding the recount and the election contest for the U. S. Senate seat between Norm Coleman and Al Franken. What is less understood is how these two events will impact the way elections are conducted in Minnesota for many years to come.

Generally speaking, it's fair to say that election administrators would not go out of their way to conduct a recount or to be involved in an election contest. However, the reality is that these events are crucial in evaluating the effectiveness of our election laws and procedures. By putting ourselves and our work under the microscope, we gain an acute understanding of the ways that our election process works on the ground with real voters.

In this article, I briefly review what happened during the recount and subsequent trial in order to identify the issues raised during this process and suggest a few changes in the election law that are likely to be adopted.

The state general election held on Tuesday, November 4, 2008 was an historic event by any definition. A record number of Minnesotans voted in the election, including the largest number of absentee voters in the state's history. Unofficial vote totals available on the morning after the election showed Coleman leading Franken by less than 800 votes. By the time all 87 counties had reviewed their records, completed their canvass of vote totals and reported them to the secretary of state, Coleman's lead had shrunk to a mere 215 votes out of slightly more than 2.9 million cast, a difference of just 0.000074 percent. The state canvass of these vote totals on November 18 set the stage for what would become the largest recount in American history.

The recount took place in more than 100 locations across the state. The most ballots recounted at a single location occurred in Ramsey County, where more than 278,000 ballots were counted. Beginning on November 19, teams of election officials, election judges, and campaign observers began the task of opening the ballot containers that had been sealed at more than 4,000 polling places on election night, piling the ballots by candidate, and counting the number of ballots in each pile in groups of 25, all as provided by state law. At our recount site in St. Paul, eight teams working simultaneously counted ballots for six to seven hours each day, counting more than 37,000 ballots per day. All recounts were completed on December 5, the deadline set by the state canvassing board.

Minnesota uses precinct count optical scan voting systems to count and compile vote totals in state elections. In fact, Minnesota was one of the first states to move to optical scan voting, with the

initial use of a single ballot counter in the city of Minnetonka in 1985. Although familiar to most voters who have taken standardized tests, from the beginning, election officials noticed that a small number of ballots, typically less than two ballots per thousand cast, were marked by the voters in ways that could not be read by the ballot counter. However, under Minnesota law, those ballots can be manually inspected during a recount or an election contest and counted, as long as the intent of the voter can be discerned from the face of the ballot.

Such was the case during the recount. The campaign representatives were permitted to challenge the counting of ballots on which the intent of the voter was unclear or on which a potential identifying mark was visible. These ballots were sent to the state canvassing board for resolution of the challenges. Many additional ballots were challenged on the basis that voters deliberately marked the ballots so that they could be individually identified. In total, nearly 6,000 challenged ballots were sent to the secretary of state at the conclusion of the recount.

By putting ourselves and our work under the microscope, we gain an acute understanding of the ways that our election process works on the ground with real voters.

At this point, the focus of events then changed to the state canvassing board. During its deliberations, three main issues arose. First, the canvassing board needed to wade through the thousands of ballots that had been challenged by the campaigns and determine if any of the challenges would be upheld. Second, the canvassing board would also need to rule on the status of

131 ballots that were cast on Election Day in a Minneapolis precinct but had subsequently been lost and could not be examined during the recount. And perhaps most importantly, the canvassing board would need to consider absentee ballots that had been rejected by election officials or election judges and not counted in the election. Following a Minnesota Supreme Court order requiring that election officials and both campaigns unanimously agree that rejected ballots should be accepted and counted, several thousand rejected absentee ballots were reviewed one more time. Of these, 933 ballots were determined to be improperly rejected and were delivered to the state canvassing board to be opened and counted.

With the conclusion of the recount and the counting of the improperly rejected absentee ballots, the canvass was concluded with reversal of the unofficial election night result and Franken was now leading the race by 225 votes. Such a reversal as a consequence of a recount is rare in Minnesota elections but not unheard of.

Under Minnesota law, a losing candidate may contest the results of an election in district court. Coleman exercised his right

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U.S. Senate recount

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to do so and on January 26, 2009 a three-judge panel appointed by the Supreme Court heard opening arguments from the attorneys representing the two sides. Over the next two months, the judges would hear testimony from hundreds of witnesses ranging from election officials to voters. At issue was the fate of the thousands of absentee ballots that had been rejected and not submitted to the secretary of state for counting.

The Coleman side argued that the state should treat absentee voters with some flexibility, recognizing that in many ways they are at a disadvantage to voters casting their ballots in person. Conversely, the Franken side insisted that the absentee ballots be considered using the clear language of the state law. On Friday, February 13, the court ruled that the remaining uncounted absentee ballots would only be considered for counting if the voter had in fact complied with the law. On that basis, 351 additional absentee ballots were opened and counted, further increasing Franken's lead. A parallel action by a group of voters who had voted for Franken also prevailed in their request to have the court open and count their improperly rejected ballots.

In the end, Franken's lead stood at 312 votes, a margin unchanged by unanimous decision of the Minnesota Supreme Court in support of the conclusion reached by the trial court.

And, in spite of the extensive coverage of the absentee voting issue, the accuracy of processing absentee ballots was demonstrated to be in excess of 99.5 percent.

How will this eight-month event impact next year's elections? As noted by the three-judge panel, Minnesota's election system works remarkably well. As verified by the recount, the accuracy of vote counting statewide was in excess of 99.9 percent. And, in spite of the extensive coverage of the absentee voting issue, the accuracy of processing absentee ballots was demonstrated to be in excess of 99.5 percent. But some changes are clearly needed, and when it convenes in February 2010, the Minnesota Legislature is likely to enact the following provisions to remedy the issues that arose in the course of the recount and trial.



Photo courtesy of immortal poet/flicker.com

- Authorize the immediate seating of a member of Congress when the election of a federal candidate is contested, either by issuing a provisional election certificate to the apparent winner or by empowering the governor to make a provisional appointment of a person who is not the contestant nor the contestee.
- Authorize canvassing boards to administratively open and count absentee ballots that are determined to be improperly rejected.
- Require that every county and municipality establish a board to process absentee ballots prior to Election Day and to inform voters whose ballots have been rejected.
- Authorize election officials to use some discretion in the processing of absentee ballots so as to enfranchise voters who make minor technical errors.
- Provide specific instructions to election officials on how to determine the intent of the voter when the voter has attempted to correct a mark mistakenly made on the ballot.
- Prohibit frivolous or automatic challenges to ballots on which the voter has not clearly attempted to identify the ballot.

With some common sense changes to address the issues identified in the recount and trial, Minnesota's election system, among the best in the nation, can continue to meet the needs and expectations of every Minnesota voter. ●

Joseph Mansky is the Ramsey County Elections Manager.



The final analysis

What MAP 150 taught us about citizen involvement and engagement

By Bill Johnston

The Citizens League hired an evaluation team to determine the effectiveness of the Minnesota Anniversary Project (MAP 150) and its demonstration projects and to identify those things that could be applied to other processes.

The team had several years experience in evaluating the effectiveness of nonprofit programs and in recommending ways to make those programs more effective. The MAP 150 demonstration projects have been completed, but as the lead evaluator, I have continued to advise the Citizens League staff on ways to weave things learned from MAP 150 into current its public involvement processes.

The evaluation of MAP 150 included three components:

- A review of the literature on citizen participation in policy development.
- Parallel surveys given to Minnesota citizens and to public officials about attitudes and practices regarding citizen participation in policy development.
- Surveys and interviews with those involved in MAP 150 demonstration activities.

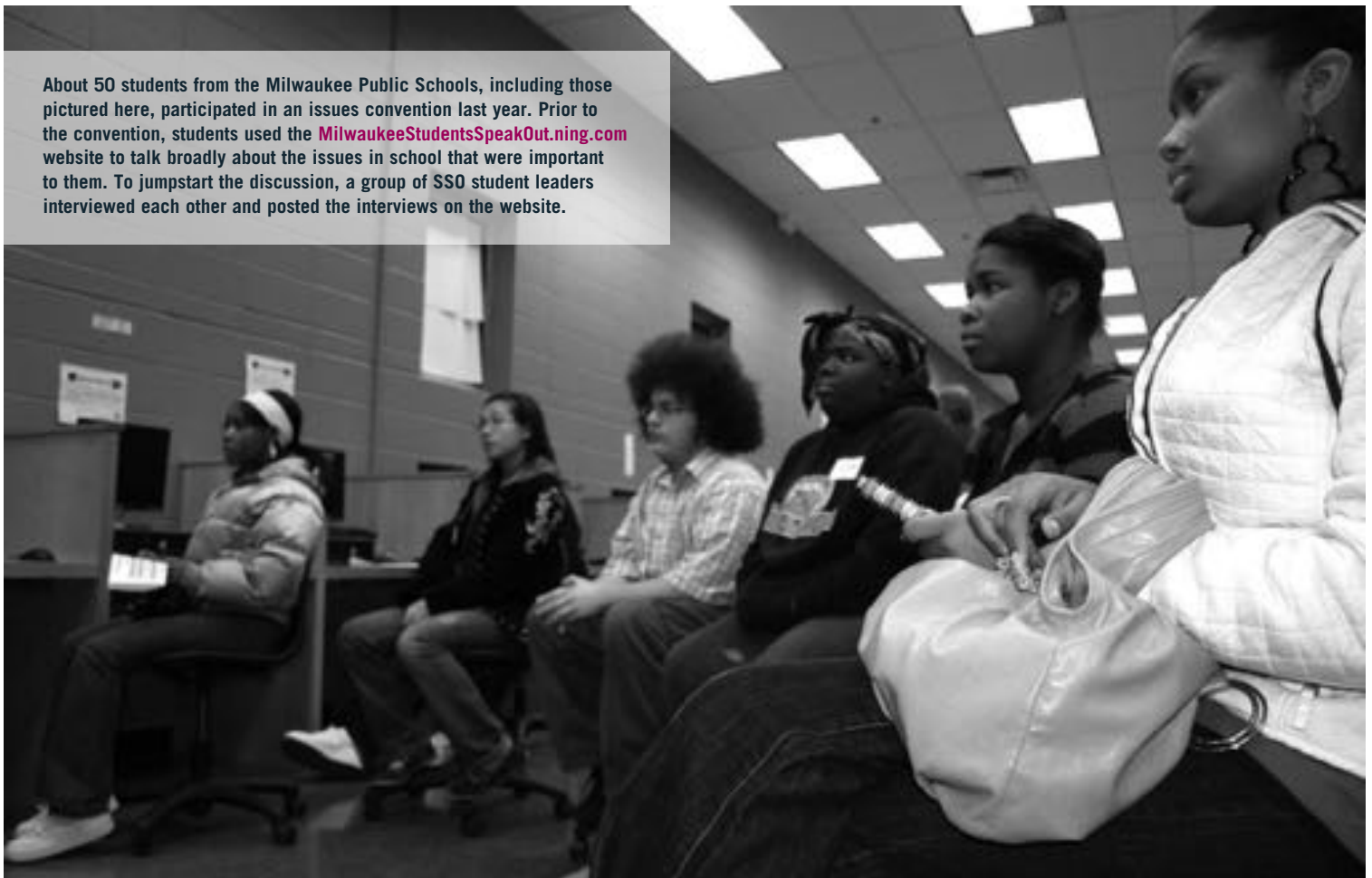
The evaluation concluded two things. First, citizens can be involved more effectively in policy development. Second, that the MAP 150 demonstration activities illuminated better ways of doing this. More specifically the evaluators found:

Citizen involvement leads to defining issues differently. When citizens are more involved in policy development, issues are defined differently than when citizens are left out of the process. This was the case with the long-term care project and with the property tax project.

Dialogue is more important to citizen perceptions of authentic involvement than the effect on outcomes. One hypothesis about citizen involvement processes is that citizens view processes as “authentic” if the processes results in policies that citizens favor. This turned out not to be true. The most critical element citizens used to evaluate the authenticity of their involvement in MAP 150 projects was the quality of the dialogue with public officials. The quality of the dialogue was more important than the eventual result. Literature on citizen involvement offers many examples of this. This was also apparent in the MAP 150 survey results, and it showed up in the property tax demonstration project and in

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About 50 students from the Milwaukee Public Schools, including those pictured here, participated in an issues convention last year. Prior to the convention, students used the MilwaukeeStudentsSpeakOut.ning.com website to talk broadly about the issues in school that were important to them. To jumpstart the discussion, a group of SSO student leaders interviewed each other and posted the interviews on the website.





Students speak out about the price of school safety

Milwaukee SSO student leaders reveal the hidden costs of police presence in schools

By Kim Farris-Berg

When young leaders from Milwaukee Students Speak Out (SSO) set out to address school safety last January, they had one goal in mind: rid their schools of police officers. Two of the four leaders were from Vincent High School, where school resource officers (SROs) had taken up residence in an effort to make the school safer. But after a fight involving 10 to 15 students during a pep rally in October 2008, and numerous other fights resulting in serious injuries, it was clear the student leaders had zero confidence in the officers, who they described as “doing nothing” to improve safety except “making life harder on students.”

But when the leaders sought to gather evidence in support of these ideas, peers and parents said they wanted police to stay. In video interviews posted on the Milwaukee SSO website, nearly all of the subjects acknowledged that there are some costs associated with having police on campus and that the officers could not make the environment “fight-proof”. Most suggested, however, that benefits are worth the costs.

Although there didn't appear to be public support for removing the officers, the students were intrigued by an online post from Kristi Cole, the Milwaukee Public Schools administrator in charge of the SRO program. “One of the goals of having SROs in schools is to develop an understanding about the role of police [throughout the community] and to build relationships with students,” Cole wrote.

The students were surprised by Cole's remarks. That was not their experience. Leader Spencer Sartin replied, “As far as relationships, the students don't speak to the police unless they are about to get arrested or get a ticket [for tardiness or arguing]. My speculation, [from] growing up in the places that most students have grown up, [is that] you don't see the police as friends. You see them as the enemy. Do the students see the police differently [as a result of the SRO program]? I think not. The fact is that they don't treat us like the students that come to school to learn. They treat us as kids that come to school to do wrong.”

Students further reported that teachers and administrators seemed to automatically call on officers to issue tickets for even minor infractions rather than work things out with students directly. Students had come to resent the officers presence.

The student leaders decided to build on Cole's interest. They proposed a platform of suggestions to Cole and Eduardo Negron, the police captain recently assigned to manage the SRO program. Officers could meet with students in small groups to discuss the purpose of the SRO program and to gain insights from young people about how to best work within each unique environment. Further, officers could show genuine interest in forming relationships and improving the school communities. They could arrange, for example, to get regular “tours” of schools from students who

could introduce them to other students and show them the campus through their eyes.

Almost as if on cue, an uninvited Vincent High assistant principal proved the students point, an SSO organizer reported. “He said that if the students were proposing an orientation, then all the school needed was an orientation for the students to teach them how to behave appropriately toward authority, how to be quiet when an adult walks into the room, and how to dress. Police walk around campus with their TASER® devices and pepper spray to keep students in line; to teach them to respect the uniform.”

The student leaders were stunned into silence. They weren't sure how to proceed. Asserting their contrary position seemed less important than preserving their positive social standing with adults at their school. The assistant principal has authority to discipline them, even delay their graduation. But Cole and Negron took the reins and publicly disagreed. In no way were officers to scare students into submission, they said.

A few weeks later, the students shared their ideas directly with officers. The officers responded that school leaders and teachers inappropriately use them as a threat against the students and that they felt powerless to stop the practice, despite the fact that it greatly diminishes their ability to build the trust necessary for students to cooperate in reducing violence.

Five months earlier, the students might have used this as grounds to try and oust the SRO program from their campuses. Now, after learning more about the program and having an opportunity to constructively express their insights about its strengths and weaknesses, they agreed to collaborate with officers to increase the potential for the program's success.

Starting this fall, students will work with school officers to form a youth advisory group to plan assemblies to explain the purpose of the SRO program, clarify what infractions officers will and won't address, and host monthly focus groups with students, school leaders, and teachers to share information and create school-specific strategies aimed at preventing violence.

Kim Farris-Berg is co-designer of Students Speak Out. She heads up the Milwaukee SSO project, a partnership between Citizens League and St. Paul-based EducationEvolving (www.educationevolving.org).

The Citizens League can help you get student input on your policy or program. For more information on our processes and tools, contact Sean Kershaw at skershaw@citizensleague.org

Final analysis

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Students Speak Out. In Students Speak Out, authentic dialogue was a key reason for that project's sustainability.

Some public officials resist citizen involvement and there are reasons for their resistance. The literature describes three reasons that public officials resist citizen involvement: prior experience with sub-populations of citizens who care only about a particular policy outcome, a natural resistance to erosion of authority, and the administrative burden of citizen-involvement processes.

Real changes resulted from the three primary MAP 150 demonstration projects. Two of the three projects show evidence of sustainability. Students Speak Out resulted in changes in teacher training with regard to bullying. The process has been rolled out in Milwaukee and is being expanded in the Minneapolis Public Schools. The property tax project resulted in a website presenting school district assessment information that was used by Minnesota citizens in school districts proposing referenda. The long-term care project has resulted in an ongoing process that brings together citizens, long-term health care experts and public policymakers to identify new proposals for solutions in long-term health care.

Some citizens involved in two of the demonstration projects felt their involvement was not authentic because they were unaware of follow-up activities after the demonstration projects had concluded. This has gnawed at the leaders of MAP 150 because they communicated with all of the citizens involved in the demonstration projects after the projects concluded. Many citizens seemed unaware, however, of having received the follow-up information. The important message for the Citizens League here is that changing the way in which citizens perceive they are involved in policy development requires more (or more effective) ways of communicating with citizens after a process has concluded.

MAP 150 has shown that citizens and public officials can work together effectively. Future Citizens League efforts may be especially valuable if they provide public officials with information on how citizen involvement processes can be administered:

- without creating an extraordinary burden
- through ways to insure that a representative cross-section of citizens are involved
- by specifying new roles for citizens in defining problems

Many citizens believe that their role in defining a problem is to let public officials know the effect the problem has on them per-

sonally. They do not necessarily see themselves as community representatives with expertise in solving problems. For citizens to be authentically involved, their roles need to be further defined.

MEASURING SUCCESS

The long-term success of new citizen involvement processes can be measured in terms of the outcomes they produce and in the sustainability of the processes. Shorter-term measures are needed,

[MAP 150's redistricting work is] "one of the first studies...that attempts to ask citizens what kind of districting they would prefer... [these questions] are hugely important, and often underemphasized."

—Justin Levitt, redistricting expert at the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University

however, to help those developing new involvement processes know whether they are on the right track and whether their efforts will eventually lead to better outcomes through sustainable citizen involvement. To help them determine whether they are on the right track, process developers can ask these questions.

Of citizens: *What is the quality of dialogue? Are public officials interacting with you in a way that indicates they understand what you are saying and want to learn more?*

Of public officials: *Do you think the citizens you are working with are representative of all of the citizens you serve? Do they seem fixed on meeting their own needs or are they flexible and growing in their understanding of comprehensive solutions?*

The quality of the dialogue and the representativeness of the citizens involved will indicate whether new citizen involvement processes are moving toward achieving the goals of sustainability and higher quality outcomes. ●

Bill Johnston is an independent program evaluator with more than 20 years of experience in program research.

Reformulating citizenship

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telephone poll, four demonstration projects, an informal survey of citizens and public officials to gauge how their views of citizen involvement processes might differ, and a review of relevant academic literature.

Citizens care about the common good and are willing to be involved in meaningful processes that influence the issues they care about.

The first eye opener from MAP 150 occurred in the summer of 2006 when four journalists from the University of Minnesota traveled throughout the state asking people about the issues that concerned them. As opposed to the caricature of the citizen as ignoramus, our journalists found people to be engaging, thoughtful, full of concern for others, and willing to take personal responsibility for outcomes that benefit their communities and society as a whole.

We followed those interviews with a statewide scientific poll that asked about citizenship and public problems. That poll produced what may have been the single most influential finding of MAP 150: Respondents stated that the biggest barrier to their involvement in public policy deci-

“i was told that i was a little punk and i was, cause of how mixed up i was in drugs, and for how messed up i was, i never did anything about it besides scream and cuss and get suspended. [With SSO] I learned that [being an active] citizen is, for one, a lot of fun. It makes you feel really good about yourself and makes you feel responsible and appreciated.”

— Shane Saunders, SSO student leader

sion making is that processes are “all talk and no action.” Likewise, our informal survey showed that people are skeptical that their input will be used: Just 31 percent of citizens think that

After much discussion, students at the Milwaukee convention decided to focus on two issues: quality learning and teaching, and safety and discipline. After the convention, student leaders continued to gather information and then wrote platforms that they presented to community and education leaders and the editorial board at the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*.



public officials use what they hear from citizens. There's an opportunity cost for participating, and in most cases, citizens said the benefit of participating does not outweigh the cost.

Participants in the four demonstration projects and the informal survey echoed the findings of the poll. In each MAP 150 demonstration project, one of the first questions people asked was, "How are you going to use this information?"

Typical citizen involvement processes do not recognize citizens for the value they add to policy-making. All citizens bring these assets to policy-making: their values, information, and capacity for action.

The academic literature suggests that there are two components to credibility—expertise and trustworthiness. This is interesting to think about in the context of civic participation. Whereas citizens may be trustworthy, they are perceived as lacking expertise. Thus, policymakers underestimate their credibility as problem solvers. Excluding public hearings, which often consist merely of recitations of citizen concerns, typical citizen involvement processes such as task forces and commissions seek to educate citizens and turn them into surrogate experts. Why use citizens in this way? Expertise is not the missing ingredient in most public decision making.

In our scientific poll, Minnesotans expressed significant frustration with the complexity of the property tax system, which makes it difficult to understand how their tax dollars are used. In subsequent conversations, local officials confirmed that their efforts to explain property taxes had been equally unsatisfactory. We designed our MAP 150 property tax project to find out what information citizens want to know about their property taxes. Although initially supportive, many public officials were skeptical about the utility of talking to citizens. Their concerns are commonly heard: "citizens don't care," "they won't understand," and "they never show up to testify anyway." In the end, our citizen groups yielded excellent information about ways to better explain property taxes. We used their insights to develop a website with school district data relevant to the fall 2007 referenda, and 85 percent of those who visited the site and responded to a brief survey said they learned "some" or "quite a lot" from the site, and about half said that the information influenced their vote. Users left comments like this one: "The data you provide is absolutely wonderful! Thank you very much. I have spent many countless hours trying to find certain things and your site answered many questions in about 3 minutes! Thank you. Thank you. Thank you."

Initially, Students Speak Out (SSO) provoked similar concerns. When we first launched SSO, a networking website to gather insights from students about what does and doesn't work in school, some parents wondered what students could possibly add to policy discussions about school if they weren't first educated

"I've been in conversation with [people from] the Minnesota Anniversary Project (MAP150). Like me, [they] worry that most of what passes for Politics 2.0 today is a mere veneer on a fundamentally broken system. Just because you can post a video or a comment on a public policy forum does not make you a genuine co-producer of public policy... The reality is that getting to genuine citizen engagement is hard—it entails a truly massive shift in the culture of government and the apparatus of political decision making.

—Anthony D. Williams, co-author of *Wikinomics: How Mass Collaboration Changes Everything*

on the issues. Others underestimated the students' ability to participate constructively in civic engagement. Much later, when a team of Minneapolis students concluded six months of work by designing and facilitating a two-hour discussion with teachers on bullying, teachers expressed surprise that students could so competently develop and lead a two-hour module.

These and other MAP 150 experiences have led the Citizens League to identify three areas where citizens add value to public problem solving. The first is in articulating the underlying values of the citizenry. Today's policy problems are not solely technical problems; embedded in most is a set of value propositions. For example, we found in our redistricting project that citizens think that it is a conflict of interest for legislators to redraw their own districts, and that they prefer more competitive districts in some cases (federal elections) and not others (state elections). Proposals for new redistricting procedures based on competition were moving forward full steam ahead in policy circles, but no one had bothered to ask citizens what they thought was important.

Second, citizens also have indispensable, but typically uncollected, information about how policies work in real life. Their anecdotes, when compiled, provide a picture of systems that data cannot. For example, one state launched what seemed to be a sensible preventative health program for Medicaid recipients. When a recipient was asked if he would participate, however, he

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replied, “No. I can’t afford the transportation to the clinic.” High school students also helped us to understand, in brand new terms, the dynamics of being enrolled in an alternative education program, and how the state law governing the programs had unintended, but highly negative, consequences that perpetuate stereotypes about them and impact learning.

Third, people also have the capacity to act in ways that contribute to the common good. Indeed, one might argue that without their active contributions no government program can fill the void. In SSO, high school students came to realize that they could be part of solution, both to prevent bullying and to work with teachers on training. In our property tax project, we saw evidence that good information influences people’s votes: voters wanted to act responsibly but had difficulty finding credible information before the MAP 150 information was posted.

One of the most powerful roles for citizens may be framing problems.

Over and over again throughout MAP 150, we observed that the general public talks about policy problems in very different terms than professionals. One person said, “People talk about learning; the experts talk about the education system; people talk about affording health care; the experts talk about reimbursement rates in the health care system.” Because they are charged with managing these complex public systems, professionals tend to think more in terms of the features of the system, its rules and regulations. Citizens have a more visceral reaction that jumps to the bottom line: Is the system producing the intended outcomes or not?

When people work together on a problem and challenge and listen to one another their views migrate, often converging to a common point of view. They often reframe the problem in terms previously not under consideration and in ways that lead to new types of solutions. Unlike many experts who are pushing for universal, big-government solutions to long-term care financing, participants in the long-term care workshop focused heavily on individual responsibility, not in a punitive way, but in recognition that without it, the system cannot remain solvent. They also suggested that issues around aging, such as how we use our resources, are issues that society must contend with generally—aging is simply pushing them to the forefront. In other words, they reframed the issue from one of aging to one of cultural predispositions concerning individual responsibility, use of resources, and entitlements.

There is a set of skills necessary to make productive use of citizens’ viewpoints and experiences and, for the most part, these skills are missing.

At the end of a very engaging session with taxpayers, a local official stood up and said he had “heard it all before.” Indeed, we found through our demonstration processes that the “translation” skills necessary to glean the value from citizen input are typically

MAP150

“I wish I had known earlier about your program and website. I would have advertised it and sent many community members here for unbiased info.”

—Anonymous comment left on the property tax demonstration project website

missing from those who design and execute public participation processes. These skills include:

- Asking the right questions that elicit the missing puzzle pieces—citizen values and how policies work on the ground.
- Moderating in-person and online discussions to challenge assumptions and biases, foster productive dialogue, and reach shared understandings.
- Listening for insights and not ideas, and with a mind not cluttered by all of the rules.
- Being able to recognize common themes and common ground, not just report what was said.
- Connecting insights to policy.

We should not be surprised at the lack of these skills; they are not integrated into the job demands of most public professions.

Room for citizens and data in decision-making

I’d like to end on a personal note. I’ve been accused lately of being an apologist for citizens, but I didn’t start out that way. My professional experiences as I began MAP 150—a Harvard graduate in public policy, a former budget director in San Francisco and Saint Paul, someone responsible for citizen involvement processes as public works director in Saint Paul—left me believing that the answers to our public challenges are to think harder and analyze more (with the right smart people in the room of course). MAP 150 changed all of that. It taught me the power of “public spaces” that permit genuine discussion and disagreement. It taught me how much people yearn to be part of the solution—not all people, but more than enough to make the difference we need. It taught me the genius that emerges from working through our collective differences to arrive at a shared understanding of the common good. I still love my spreadsheets and data. I still pore through the research. But now, it has more meaning, more context, and infinitely more hope. ●

Stacy Becker is the MAP 150 project director. For more information on MAP 150, go to www.MAP150.org



What happens when we give students a real voice in education policy discussions?

Often they exceed our expectations and improved communication with parents, teachers, and policymakers can produce real results

By George Mayer

As a moderator for Students Speak Out (SSO), I have observed a clear disconnect between students and nearly all adults—parents, teachers, administrators, and policymakers. This disconnect becomes plain when students and adults talk about one another. An overwhelming consensus emerges: “they” don’t care. For students, “they” refers to adults, and, as one may guess, for adults, “they” refers to students. Students believe that adults don’t care about teaching, but, perhaps more important, how students feel or what they think. Adults contend that students don’t care about class, their teachers, or each other. I like to think that both views are incorrect.

For example, one of my responsibilities as moderator is to monitor the SSO website. I delete “inappropriate” groups, photos, and comments, for example, and notify the student who made the posting. I recently deleted a group created by a student and explained to her that groups are only allowed if they pertained to school. She wrote back, “O WOW DAT IZ SO FREAKY GAY DNT NOBODY EVEN CARE ABOUT ISSUES ABOUT SCHOOL...DIS WEBSITE GAY ANYWAYZ.”

I took her response at face value and replied: “You spend hours in school every day, why don’t you care?” She answered: “NO SCHOOL TEACHERS OR PRINCIPLE AT OUR SCHOOL CARES ABOUT NUN OF THE STUDENTS SO WE DNT CARE...AND I DO CARE I JUST DNT CARE 2 TELL ANY1 ABOUT IT.” I probed further, asking her why she felt that way. Our exchanges eventually led to a discussion about the lack of trust between students and teachers. We are still in conversation and she tells me that she is trying harder to work with teachers—it has become important to her.

Students often tend toward two extremes: they either act out or drop out, or they make a genuine effort to be constructive. Adults label the former delinquents and expect the latter to meet impossibly high standards.

Unfortunately, bridging the standoff when trust is lacking is atypical. The more common remedy for this disconnect, from both parties, tends to perpetuate the problem. Students often tend toward two extremes: they either act out or drop out, or they make a genuine effort to be constructive. Adults label the former delinquents and expect the latter to meet impossibly high standards. For example, a group of SSO students from the Milwaukee Public Schools organized and wrote a platform aimed at improv-

ing the relationship between students and police. They presented this platform to a police captain and the district attorney (among others). The district attorney, while being extremely impressed and receptive, asked the students how their platform would

prevent instances such as school shootings. Needless to say the students were stymied and discouraged as their platform did not address that issue at all. But it was an unfair question—indeed, one that adults, too, have been unable to answer.

Effective public policy must recognize the interests and motivations of all of those impacted by the policy. For example, one student recently wrote, “They are closing school because of the swine flu, so students are going to the mall instead. Wouldn’t it have been better to keep the students in school?” In order to understand various perspectives, we need a trusted platform that supports and encourages productive communication and helps find common ground. Sites such as SSO are working towards this. And in my experience as moderator, if you respect the views of students, they in turn respect yours. ●

George Mayer is studying English and journalism at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

BECOME A CITIZENS LEAGUE AMBASSADOR

Would you like to help new members learn about the Citizens League and find ways to get involved? Would you be willing to tell a new member why you joined?

The Citizens League’s new ambassador program connects new members with existing members who can help them find engagement opportunities and learn about the Citizens League’s many offerings. We need active members like you to volunteer to be our first ambassadors. As an ambassador, you’ll be assigned a new member who has expressed interest in

getting involved. You also have access to an online “resource hub” that includes all of the information you need to help your new member get engaged, such as lists of committees, action groups, events, activities, and volunteer opportunities. Ambassadors also receive free admission to Citizens League events at which they volunteer.

For more information contact Catherine Beltmann at cbeltmann@citizensleague.org, or attend our kick-off event on August 11 at Axel’s Bonfire on Grand Ave in St. Paul.”

PERSPECTIVES

Expanding Minnesota's Conversation



Sustaining our environment and our democracy

The old model of environmental “command-and-control” laws, with rigid rules and penalties, can’t meet today’s environmental challenges

by Lawrence A. Baker

Minnesotans are increasingly concerned about the environment, and with good reason. We have not been able to reduce our energy consumption, more than 1,000 of Minnesota children tested have elevated levels of lead in their blood, the sustainability of our groundwater supplies is uncertain, and more than 1,300 Minnesota surface waters are impaired. And within the past few months we have learned that the green ash borer, an exotic beetle accidentally imported from Asia, threatens Minnesota’s 800 million ash trees. Can our current system of government deal with these problems and sustain our environmental future?

Minnesotans boldly bought into the idea of long-term environmental sustainability in 2008 when 56 percent of voters approved the Clean Water, Land, and Legacy Amendment, signaling their willingness to pay higher taxes to assure a sustainable future. Achieving a sustainable future requires more than money, however, it also requires changes in the way we govern. Most of our current governmental system was created in an era when “environmental sustainability” wasn’t on the radar screen. Past environmental regulation generally has been driven by crises. The famous Cuyahoga River fire in Cleveland served as the catalyst for passage of the 1972 Clean Water Act, and, locally, the widespread sewage problems led to formation of the Metropolitan Council in 1967 (based in part on a recommendation from a Citizens League report). Most 20th century environmental laws were based on a command-and-control model, with rigid rules and clear penalties for violating them. This worked within limits. The Clean Water Act did a great job of controlling “point” sources of pollution like municipal sewage, but it did little to reduce “nonpoint” sources such as contaminated runoff from lawns and farms. To create a sustainable future we need an “environmental democracy” that is more adaptive than our current system, and

that takes advantage of our fragmented system of government and engages citizens.

A MORE SUSTAINABLE MODEL

In order to create a more sustainable future, our local and state governments first need to respond proactively to environmental changes rather than waiting for a crisis. In his book *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed*, author Jared Diamond concludes that one of the key reasons societies collapse is that they fail to see problems before they arise. One obstacle that prevents us from seeing emerging problems now is the inaccessibility of environmental data. Our data on the environment is inadequate and, with few exceptions, nearly inaccessible to anyone lacking specialized skills. Fortunately, we now have technologies that can make environmental data as easy to visualize and understand as a TV weather forecast. This is already happening at Arizona State University where the **WaterSim** computer model allows policymakers with no training in hydrology to visualize the effects of various water management scenarios. (You can play, too, at <http://watersim.asu.edu/>)

Second, we need to use our highly fragmented form of governance to our advantage. Minnesota ranks eighth in the nation in the number local government units. Within the state there are 3,526 local government units, including 1,799 towns and townships, 854 municipalities, 87 counties, 89 watershed districts and water management organizations, and 91 Soil and Water Conservation Districts. If one accepts the idea that “all ecology is local,” the local control provided by this fragmented governmental system could be a potential strength in creating a new environmental democracy. One major factor that limits our ability to take advantage of this, however, is that these governmental units are often poorly equipped to deal with complex environmental problems. State government should do more to empower these local

units by providing them with needed technical tools and training—complex mapping, useable predictive models, educational materials, model codes, and more. In my opinion, this might be one of the best uses of the state’s Legacy funds (teach a man to fish...etc.).

Third, we need to shift our thinking from government to governance—collaborations among governmental institutions, informal and formal civic organizations, and individuals. Solving the problems related to unsustainable water supplies, the consumption of non-renewable resources, and nonpoint source pollution will require behavioral changes on the part of all 5 million Minnesotans. Government alone cannot force us to change our behavior—and we wouldn’t want to live under a government that could. But changing behaviors will require a complex mix of government action (“green” or “brown” taxes, incentives, and education) and support from community organizations through newsletters and social networking. Governments can promote civic engagement, however, by developing educational tools that make citizens’ actions effective, by providing accessible environmental data, and by creating more opportunities for citizen-agency collaboration through programs like Minnesota’s nationally recognized Citizens Lake Monitoring Program.

If we are to achieve a sustainable future, our government needs to adapt. We must create data systems that allow us to anticipate environmental problems before they become crises. We need to arm local governments with the technical tools and training they needed to solve local environmental problems at the local level. Most importantly, we must engage citizens and encourage them to become actors of change instead of passive consumers of government services. ●

Lawrence A. Baker is a Senior Fellow at the University of Minnesota, the owner of WaterThink, and Chairman of the Board of Friends of the Sunrise River.



Don't count Minnesota out just yet

Reports of the demise of Minnesota's eighth House seat may have been greatly exaggerated

by Todd Graham

Census-watchers have been speculating about whether Minnesota has enough people. Every decennial census is followed by a musical-chairs reapportionment of congressional districts. Some pundits have identified Minnesota's current representation to be "at risk" due to Minnesota's supposedly lackluster population growth over the last decade.

The state demographer, Tom Gillaspay, contributed his own analysis last December, saying Minnesota could keep or lose a seat in Congress. "It's just too close to call," Gillaspay suggested. Unfortunately, the state's Capitol press corps has a habit of reading between the lines. Within one day, Gillaspay's remarks congealed into new conventional wisdom that the 2010 census outcome is already known; the eighth seat is—poof—gone to Arizona.

Well, don't count Minnesota out just yet. There is more good news than has been shared. First, the analyses that grabbed headlines in December are just that. Much like fantasy football, these population projections are a sort of a "fantasy census," in that the population projections for 2010 are extrapolated forward, starting from where one thinks the numbers stand today. Those numbers are based on the Census Bureau's annual intercensal estimates, which rely mainly on vital statistics and counts of IRS tax returns. If one trusts the intercensal estimates (never mind households who are below IRS's radar), then we can plot out Minnesota's magic number: Minnesota keeps or loses its eighth House seat at a population of about 5,320,000. To see how the calculations work, and scenario-test the competition for the 435th seat in Congress, download a spreadsheet from <http://academicscores.googlepages.com/census2010-08.xls>

One major problem with this fantasy census is that the intercensal estimates mentioned above come with a track record

of fuzzy math and gaping, late-in-the-decade discrepancies. Consider this: The Census Bureau estimated Minnesota's 2008 population at 5,220,000. Meanwhile, the state demographer and Metropolitan Council, which also publish annual estimates, put Minnesota's 2008 population at about 5,300,000. Can Minnesota reach 5,320,000 by 2010? Yes, but after all the census counting is done, the "magic number" threshold needed to keep eight representatives in the House may be something other than 5,320,000, depending on population

Intercensal estimates come with a track record of fuzzy math and late-in-the-decade discrepancies.

changes in other states. In April, I informally surveyed demographers in other states. Analysts from seven states responded that they had analyzed discrepancies. Six of the seven states expect that their "real" populations are 1, 1.5, 3 or 4 percent higher than census intercensal estimates. (The states indicating a 3 or 4 percent discrepancy are all immigration-receiving, sun-belt states.) Elsewhere, in other states, state or local governments have successfully petitioned the Census Bureau for higher intercensal estimates. Minnesota does not do this, because we instead model our own estimates.

If all this is a puzzle, the good news is fantasy census is not the real game. And the time to stand up and be counted is coming. Yes, there will be a 2010 census. By early 2011, we will have counts of population that are preferably (far) over the intercensal estimates discussed above. Demographers and census-watchers will have new numbers to crunch. And, in typical Minnesota fashion, we may learn that the counts exceeded our expectations in the dark, depressed days of December 2008.

And there is more to it. First and foremost, Minnesota households need to participate in the 2010 census. High levels of participation and response (80 to 100 percent) offer the surest path to accurate, complete counts and reliable representation of our demographic diversity.

There will be communities and neighborhoods where response rates are just average (70 to 80 percent) or lower. This has been observed in past decennial censuses and is depicted in a special tabulation of Census 2000 non-response rates, online at http://ask.census2010.gov/cgi-bin/askcensus2010.cfg/php/enduser/std_adp.php?p_faaid=1410.

Census Bureau enumerators, for their part, will work in all markets to gain the participation of population missed by the initial questionnaire mailings. Meanwhile, local census partners and Complete Count Committees will target areas with historically low response rates for special attention.

Ultimately, the 2010 census needs to count everyone. Statisticians can impute counts of the missed, non-responding population. But considering the assumptions necessary to do this—assumptions concerning housing occupancy (and vacancy) and the characteristics of who was missed—we know this is not the best outcome. Counts are more complete and representative with greater participation. Friends of the census and community leaders need to emphasize that the census is a civic good. There is no risk involved in participating—personal information gathered by the Census Bureau is confidential and protected by federal law. Finally, every census questionnaire matters.

Achieving a complete and accurate 2010 census is in our hands. See you in 2010. ●

Todd Graham is principal forecaster and demographer at the Metropolitan Council and partners with the state demographer in preparing the state's annual estimates of population.

8/11

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