



JOURNAL

Expanding the Civic Imagination



Common ground. Common good.

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Shining a light on public policy

The Journal's core mission continues

By Larry Schumacher

Some publications exist to further the ambitions and visibility of a publisher or owner. From the start, the *Minnesota Journal* was all about ideas, as Judy Alnes describes in an [essay about her father](#), Journal creator Steve Alnes. The Journal has always strived to, in Alnes' words, "present a rigorous analysis of public policy choices."

As a Citizens League publication, we have strived to make sure each issue is a reflection of our mission and identity—it should help identify, frame and propose solutions to public problems; develop civic leaders in all generations who govern for the common good; and organize the individual and institutional relationships necessary to achieve those goals.

Beginning with this edition, we hope to include your voice in that effort to a greater degree. We asked you to write on a theme central to the Citizens League's work—common assumptions in public policy that are misplaced and need to be reexamined and reframed in order to make progress—and you responded. This is a new approach, but it is in keeping with our civic policy agenda, which includes bringing diverse voices into the policy discussion.

Inside, you'll find challenges to conventional wisdom on higher education including Beth Berry on [the education gap](#), Kris Lockhart on [scholarships for undocumented students](#) and our own Lindsey Alexander on [lifetime learning](#).

On transportation, we have Michael Iacono on [value capture for transit](#) and Charles Marohn on modernizing [transportation spending priorities](#). Dr. Artika Tyner writes on the [value of early childhood education](#) investments, and Julie Bunn and Mariah Levison share their perspectives on the proper roles of [common sense](#) and [human needs](#), respectively, in policy considerations.

We asked you to write on a theme central to the Citizens League's work—common assumptions in public policy that are misplaced and need to be reexamined and reframed in order to make progress—and you responded.

And Executive Director Sean Kershaw asks whether workplaces are the new bowling leagues in this edition's [Viewpoint](#) column, which looks at our growing Civics@Work employee engagement program.

But there were many more submissions than we could fit in this edition, and we're expanding our online Journal presence to match the wealth of

excellent writing we received. Check www.citizensleague.org/blog for exclusive regular installments of web-only Journal articles. We hope to make this a regular feature of the online Journal experience, to be revamped in 2014 to offer a more modern, native digital experience than is currently possible.

In 2014, we plan to also roll out a redesigned look for the print edition of the Journal—one that brings a more visually engaging and appealing look to match the high-quality content our authors routinely offer. In doing so, it is our goal to make the Minnesota Journal the premiere public policy publication in the

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Building a League of Citizens

Thanks to our newest sustaining member: Jim Nikolai!.

Sustaining members schedule regular monthly or quarterly payments of any amount, or schedule automatic annual donations. Become a sustaining member today at www.razoo.com/citizensleague.

Thanks to our new and rejoining members and contributing organizations 01/01/13-4/15/13

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The Citizens League involves people of all backgrounds, parties and ideologies to create and advance solutions for Minnesota. The Citizens League's approach to policy—civic policymaking—results in the civic policy agenda, our case for action that is based on the belief that all people and organizations play 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.





From bowling alone to working together

Are workplaces the new bowling leagues?

by Sean Kershaw

Robert Putnam's ground-breaking 2000 book *Bowling Alone* fundamentally changed the conversation on civic life in America. But while it was excellent at describing what had happened over the previous generation, it may have inadvertently stopped us from seeing what is possible in this one.

We need a new conversation about civic life that picks up where Putnam left off, and helps Minnesotans find a place where they can get down to the work of improving our democracy. In this century, I'm increasingly convinced that workplaces are serving some of the same purposes that Putnam's bowling leagues did in the last one.

Putnam describes the critical roles institutions/organizations play in building civic infrastructure. Bowling leagues and other voluntary civic institutions built "bridging capital," providing a structure that allows people from diverse backgrounds to interact around a common purpose—whether they are talking about the latest bowling scores or the latest news. Bowling leagues were essentially "democracy leagues" that provided a place for citizens to build the civic skills and relationships that a democracy demands.

A REVOLUTION AT WORK

In the thirteen years since the book was published, the natures of both civic life and the workplace have undergone a revolution.

First, as neighborhoods have become more homogeneous, workplaces today are the most diverse settings we regularly encounter. Take for example the Citizens League's home, *CoCo*, a place "for more collaborative ways of working, meeting and learning." Not only does CoCo provide the flexibility that we need organizationally, CoCo's structure mirrors the collaborative and cross-sector work we do.

Second, the skills required by employers are increasingly civic skills. We are learning from our current *post-secondary edu-*

cation project that no matter the sector or role, employers need employees who can: communicate effectively; work as a team; make decisions independently that benefit the group; and work across differences. What makes someone a good employee also makes them a good citizen—and vice versa.

Third, the role of work in our lives has changed. Bowling leagues were prevalent when many American families had a parent who worked and another who ran the household. Today, more and more families are dual-income. Portable devices keep workers tethered long after they leave the office. The last thing many people have time for once they get home is to get involved "out there." Their opportunities to be a citizen should also be "in here"—in the places people already spend time.

CIVICS@WORK

As a benefit for our organizational members, the Citizens League brings to the workplace conversations on a wide range of topics. Through *Civics@Work*, our employee engagement program (sponsored by Target), we aim to: educate Minnesotans on important policy issues; model civil dialogue and discussion on important issues; and inspire participants to see the roles they can play in solving public problems.

Several things have stood out in this process:

First—employees are eager to learn about policy and civic issues, and will take the time out of their workday to do so. Evaluations are always positive, and turnout almost always exceeds expectations.

Second—employees are grateful that the company values them enough to invest in their civic education and provide these opportunities. No employer has dictated how the conversations should be framed, or told employees how to act on the information.

Finally, because the fundamental nature of being a citizen is to help produce the

common good, the "productive" aspect of the workplace mirrors what we need from all citizens.

There are certainly limits to this approach—for example, the difficulty in reaching hourly and evening employees—but it provides a glimpse into the civic and democratic opportunities that we face if we re-think where we can learn and practice democracy.

THE WORK OF ORGANIZING

The Citizens League is still a voluntary civic institution as it was when we were founded in the heyday Putnam describes. But our mission now focuses on using a civic organizing approach to build civic capacity and infrastructure inside all institutions (including our own) as we achieve our strategic goals of impacting public policy and civic leadership development.

We've seen in our partnership with *Kowalski's Markets* what happens when a workplace completely embraces its role as a democratic institution. Through their work in the *Minnesota Active Citizenship Initiative* (of which we are a member), Kowalski's is not just a more successful business by every measure, they are building democracy and civic leaders inside their company, and inside Minnesota.

The biggest civic challenge we face is that people still want to participate in civic life and democracy, but the places where people learn and practice the necessary skills have either disappeared, or changed in radical ways. We need to recognize that all organizations have a democratic role and need to build the capacity to realize this role.

From bowling leagues to the Citizens League: It's time to stop bowling alone and start working together! ●

Sean Kershaw is the executive director of the Citizens League and a member. He can be reached at skershaw@citizensleague.org, 651-289-1070, @seankershaw (Twitter), or Facebook.



Thoughts for your pennies

The Minnesota Journal's history, from its founder's daughter

By Judy Alnes

The *Minnesota Journal* got its start in the mid-1980s. I remember its humble beginnings in our music room at my parents' home. My father sat at the computer with papers strewn about as he wrestled with how to express an idea in the best way possible. As a long-time journalist, my father was always driven to frame keen and thoughtful analysis of challenges facing our region. At no time was that fervor stronger than when it was time for the Journal to go to press.

Dad, aka Steve Alnes, started the Journal after a stint leading the now-defunct Upper Midwest Council—a think tank serving the [Ninth Federal Reserve District](#). His time at the council had him stymied about how best to help our region wrestle with the important issues of the day. His first step after leaving the council was to start his own consulting firm named Alnes Resources with a tagline that reflected his unwavering ability to find humor in the ordinary: “Thoughts for Your Pennies.”

The idea for the Journal had been simmering on the back burner of my Dad's mind for a long time. Could a local publication present rigorous analysis of public policy choices? Would people pay an annual subscription that would allow him to make a living preparing this kind of analysis?

The answer was “yes” but to only one of the questions. He could and did create a journal that provided rigorous analysis. He couldn't make money doing it. That's where the Citizens League came in. Its membership shared the values of rigorous, thoughtful issue analysis. When my father approached the League about taking over the Journal, its response was enthusiastic. Indeed, the Journal was exactly the kind of publication its members wanted. They agreed to pay my father exactly one dollar to transfer own-

ership of the Journal to the Citizens League. My father continued as the Journal's editor.

The early articles in the Journal, like today, were written by a Who's Who of Minnesota's community leadership. There are articles by legislators, city officials, university and community leaders, corporate CEOs and more than a few pundits. In the

bound tomes you can track the comings and goings of many important community issues: achieving job growth; closing the gap in health insurance; the high cost of roads; needed tax policy change, to name a few. And in case you're thinking nothing ever changes, some of the headlines portend how much times really have

changed. How about “Recycling Struggles for Acceptability” or “Show of Hands Predicts National Health Plan”?

In the eulogy delivered by former Citizens League Executive Director Curt Johnson at my father's memorial service, Curt noted that my father never got the dollar promised him when he sold the Journal to the Citizens League. Our family's financial loss, which we have survived, has most certainly become your gain. For the price of your [Citizens League membership](#), you get a subscription to the Journal and much more. Indeed, you get to play a part in understanding and shaping the way Minnesotans view policy choices. For your pennies, you get the carefully shaped thoughts and ideas of many of the area's sharpest thinkers. It is as good a bargain as is available anywhere in our community. My dad would like that. ●

Judy Alnes is a Citizens League member and has served as executive director of MAP for Nonprofits since 1997. Prior to joining MAP, Judy served as vice president, marketing and fund development at CommonBond for four years and as director, programs and public policy at Resources for Child Caring for three years.

For your pennies, you get the carefully shaped thoughts and ideas of many of the area's sharpest thinkers.

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state, and to use it not only to inform and engage our membership, but also to drive public policy and civic engagement discussions and debates in Minnesota.

Look for additional upgrades in coming editions, including a page dedicated to bringing our members up to speed on some of the recent events and activities they may have missed. We also hope to integrate more social media responses to the theme question posed for each edition, using the #MNJournal tag on Twitter and discussions on Facebook.

We will continue as always to make the case for Citizens League priorities in the Minnesota Journal, including explaining

why Minnesota needs a new model for public policy and what that looks like; what civic policy making means; and what rebuilding our civic infrastructure means. Pieces that clearly articulate a Citizens League core policy position will continue to receive the “Civic Policy Agenda” stamp, including our logo.

If you have ideas about how to make the Minnesota Journal even better, an idea for a story or would like to write one, please contact me. Thank you for your readership.

Larry Schumacher is the Citizens League's communications manager, editor of the Minnesota Journal, and a member. He can be reached via email at lschumacher@citizensleague.org and by phone at 651-289-1074.



Supporting life in “permanent beta”

Higher education and workforce institutions must adapt to the new economic reality

By Lindsey Alexander

Since January of 2010, the Citizens League has been engaged in work around [higher education reform](#). This began with the first phase when the study committee was asked to define the scope of our work. What did Minnesota’s higher education landscape look like? Where should the Citizens League focus its efforts? This group came up with a framing statement that emphasized three key areas:

- (1) 21st century workers must possess the skills to “invent, adapt and reinvent,” both on the job and in their careers overall.
- (2) Individuals need to have easy access to learning opportunities over the course of their lifetimes.
- (3) Within the K-12 system (and beyond), students need help identifying, navigating and ultimately creating career pathways.

We remain convinced this is the right focus for our higher education efforts. Navigating education—both K-12 and post-secondary—and employment today requires a completely different mindset than prior generations. Not only do our workforce and

Despite the fact that almost 72 percent of post-secondary students reported working in 2011; 20 percent of this group worked full-time, year-round.

post-secondary institutions need to align themselves to support this new paradigm, but we—as individuals—need to as well.

For some, this will be easy. There are plenty who like to switch jobs frequently, who relish in staying ahead of the curve and finding new opportunities or new pathways. For others, this new mindset will be more difficult to embrace.

In his book, *The Start-Up of You*, Silicon Valley entrepreneur Reid Hoffman introduces this new mindset by using the analogy of an escalator. For the past several decades, the deal was this: An individual would graduate college, enter a company at ground level of the escalator, spend a career getting “groomed and mentored” and ascending the corporate ladder, taking more senior positions and making more money, until around age 65 they stepped off the escalator into a comfortably funded retirement. As they ascended the escalator, others would get on behind them and do the same.

The bad news for some is that escalator is broken. A [2010 National Journal article](#) perhaps puts it best:

But now the escalator is jammed at every level. With jobs scarce, many young people are stuck at the bottom, unable to

take that first step. Those who have been lucky or skillful enough to get on the escalator in the past few years are often not rising smoothly. They might gain a job, lose it, and fall back several steps or off the escalator altogether. There they must jostle with each successive class of graduates trying to squeeze on at the bottom. Meanwhile, at the other end, with the stock market collapse decimating 401(k) plans, fewer older workers are moving briskly off the escalator into retirement. ... Compounding the pressure, more middle-aged workers are being toppled from the upper steps by layoffs, which force them to compete for space lower down that junior colleagues might once have occupied. Rather than advancing in smooth procession, everyone is stepping on everybody else.

In addition, the pace of innovation—across sectors—has accelerated dramatically. For many firms, the three- and five-year business plans are relics of the past. Some firms have abandoned annual employee evaluations, moving toward quarterly evaluations (they can’t wait another nine months to find out if an employee is getting the job done). As Thomas Friedman wrote in *The New York Times*, the Great Recession has forced many employers to rethink employment decisions, asking, “Can this person add value every hour, every day—more than a worker in India, a robot or a computer? Can he or she help my company adapt by not only doing the job today, but also reinventing the job for tomorrow?”

How, then, do we meet these new realities of the labor market?

Hoffman advocates something he calls “permanent beta.” Beta in this sense refers to technology lingo; a “beta” version is released and tested in order to find flaws before a full-scale launch. “Permanent beta,” as Hoffman applies it, means always living “in the test phase” of your career, making a commitment to lifelong learning. In “permanent beta,” the mantra is no longer “ready, aim, fire,” but “aim, fire, aim, fire, aim, fire.”

The Citizens League’s work in higher education encourages this way of thinking. But to live in “permanent beta,” we need (1) our workforce system, (2) our educational system (both K-12 and post-secondary) and (3) individuals to understand this new reality.

Take Minnesota’s workforce centers for example. Currently these statewide centers spend most of their time and resources on individuals who are in “crisis-mode,” having lost a job or unable to find one to begin with. What if an individual could find a “permanent beta” counselor at the workforce centers? Someone who could help them understand and catalog their aptitudes, experiences and skills and see potential pathways throughout their career and before they are out of work. They might help individuals identify an additional credential or course(s) that might take them in a completely different direction than their current one. These counselors could equip individuals with the



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Private Donor Scholarships for DREAMers

A Public Policy 'Workaround'

By Kris Lockhart

There are consequences of some legislation that are unjust, harsh and simply not consistent with the values by which many try to live. As engaged citizens, we have both the right and the responsibility to call attention to and address these injustices wherever and whenever possible.

And while many work tirelessly in the critical, painstaking and often protracted processes of repealing and/or challenging the constitutionality of unjust legislation, we must also be creative and develop other ways of engaging in public policy until legislative change is affected. Consequently, concerned citizens have

There are many, many Minnesota students who could, and would, be able to take advantage of the type of scholarship program that supported six students, all of whom will graduate this year. But funds are limited.

looked for ways to take action that don't involve or depend on the actions of any branch of the government. And while remaining mindful of the restrictions imposed by all branches of government that have spoken in a public policy domain, many turn to "workarounds" in order to ameliorate the injustices caused by existing legislation.

LEGISLATION AS A BARRIER TO EDUCATION

One example of legislation with consequences being challenged on many fronts involves federal statutes that link educational benefits to immigration status.¹ These statutes present a barrier to higher education for those who have come to be known as DREAMers. DREAMers include students born outside of the United States, many of whom came to this country as children with their parents and have lived in this country for most of their lives. They are referred to as "DREAMers" because they comprise most of the individuals who meet the general requirements of the federal Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act, which has yet to be enacted.

DREAMers have a right to a public primary and secondary education and can also legally attend colleges and universities. There is no federal law that prohibits their admission to college, and no law requires students to prove citizenship in order to enter institutions of higher education. The Department of Homeland Security has stated on more than one occasion that colleges and universities are not required to ask about the immigration status of their students or identify or report the presence of DREAMers

to the government. However, the existing federal laws noted above are interpreted to prohibit public colleges and universities from providing "educational benefits" to these students unless such benefit has been specifically and locally authorized.

DREAMers aren't eligible for federal financial aid in any state. And Minnesota does not have legislation, such as those known as state Dream Acts, specifically authorizing the provision of educational benefits to DREAMers. Consequently, these students are not eligible for the lower, in-state tuition paid by the classmates with whom they attended Minnesota high schools, regardless of how long they have lived in the state. Because Minnesota has no authorizing legislation, DREAMers are also ineligible for Minnesota state grants, scholarships and most loans. The state's public institutions are not able to provide them institution-sponsored financial aid, even if private donors provide the funds in question. Therefore, because these students qualify for no federal or state aid, they often are the students with the highest unmet financial need, and higher education is virtually inaccessible to them.

WORKING AROUND BARRIERS TO HIGHER EDUCATION

It seems axiomatic that our future depends on our children and that education is critical to their ability to solve the world's most challenging problems. Because of this, many have worked nationwide to overcome the harmful impact of the federal statutes that impede the education of our nation's immigrant children. Many individuals and groups across the state recognize that the harm is not just suffered by individual DREAMers, but also by their communities and the state. The loss of the actualization of DREAMers' full potential for societal, economic and community contributions deplete future development of the state's social and economic capital at a time when we need it more than ever.

And when a group of individuals working in higher education saw bright, ambitious students who were unable to fulfill their dreams to attend college, they strategized about what could be done. They reached out to colleagues working in higher education across the country to find ways to work around the barriers presented by federal legislation limiting the provision of educational benefits by public institutions. In so doing, they sought creative and viable ways to enhance educational opportunities for some of the state's most promising children. The educators and activists in states that had long struggled with this issue, including California, Texas, Arizona and New Mexico, provided an answer.

The idea required a collaborative effort between educators, private donors, local foundations, community activists and leaders, and bright, committed, courageous students. Educators identified financial and institutional barriers preventing these students from being successful. And while they attempted to modify institutional policies and practices that had been identified, they also focused on quantifying and addressing the students' extraordinary financial need. Private donors were identified who were interested in paying for the education of these students, and these private donors committed to fully finance the education of six students for all four years of their undergraduate education.

A local foundation that administered scholarship funds agreed to help create and administer a new scholarship fund to support these students. And community activists and leaders assisted in identifying potential students, helping to support the many other needs that came to be identified during the course of their educa-

Many private colleges and universities across the country provide financial aid for DREAMers, as do numerous individuals and families, foundations, nonprofits and for-profit organizations that widely publicize the availability of financial aid for DREAMers.

tion and forming the “village” that it took to continue to identify and remediate barriers, while others put together this privately funded scholarship initiative one step at a time.

And so, the workaround involved taking advantage of the fact that the federal legislation in question does not restrict private donors, whether they are individuals, foundations or organizations. In fact, many private colleges and universities across the country provide financial aid for DREAMers, as do numerous individuals and families, foundations, nonprofits and for-profit organizations that widely publicize the availability of financial aid for DREAMers.

However, because of the rules and restrictions, the cost of these students’ education is very high. And there are many, many Minnesota students who could, and would, be able to take advantage of the type of scholarship program that supported six students, all of whom graduate this year. But funds are limited. It would take significant administrative support to identify donors, connect them to private foundations, create and process scholarship programs and manage the scholarships. So while this workaround was successful for six of our state’s talented DREAMers, it is not a perfect solution.

Another challenge must be discussed. In most situations, lasting change to achieve true social justice requires efforts not only across all branches of government, but it flows from long-term activism throughout the affected communities. The work done in these communities is virtually always initiated by and—if done respectfully—guided by those who put their lives, their safety and their souls on the line by taking risks and speaking the truth of their lived experiences. These activists share their stories and allow others to use their stories to demonstrate the depth and breadth of the compelling, continuing injustices. And those who

are chosen to take advantage of situational public policy workarounds carry individual and community burdens.

This was the case in the conception, creation and life of this scholarship program. The six students who were supported lived and worked with both those who knew nothing of their struggle as well as those who did not have the same advantages. This makes for a very complicated existence and role in activism, to say nothing of earning one’s undergraduate degree.

And so while this is a workaround that achieved something meaningful for six students, it will take legislative reform to actually remove the existing barrier to educating the state’s immigrant children. ●

Kris Lockhart is the associate vice president for equity and diversity at the University of Minnesota.



The Citizens League has supported Minnesota legislation that would allow public colleges and universities to grant private scholarship money to undocumented students, as well as reduce other financial barriers for these students.

This legislation—the Minnesota Prosperity Act (also known as the MN Dream Act)—will allow students who meet certain criteria to pay in-state tuition at public institutions and to access state financial aid, as well as allow Minnesota State Colleges and Universities schools and the University of Minnesota to use private funding as financial aid for students, regardless of immigration status. The Prosperity Act was passed into law in May 2013.

Addressing these cost barriers is one piece of what Minnesota should do to reduce unique barriers to educating immigrant students. For more information, see the Citizens League’s 2009 report, “[Educating Minnesota’s Immigrant Students](#).” For an update on what happened to our legislative priorities this year, visit our blog at <http://bit.ly/16VOgEL>.

¹ The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, sec. 411(d) which provides, in part: States may provide public benefits to “not qualified” immigrants ... only through enacting state law after this bill is enacted.

Section 505 of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 (Title 8, Chapter 14, Sec. 1623(a)) states: “an alien who is not lawfully present in the United States shall not be eligible on the basis of residence within a State (or a political subdivision) for any postsecondary education benefit unless a citizen or national of the United States is eligible for such a benefit (in no less an amount, duration, and scope) without regard to whether the citizen or national is such a resident.”



A TORCH that lights the way to higher education

Helping shrink the Latino education gap in Northfield

By Beth Berry

The educational achievement gap between Caucasian and minority students in Minnesota is one of the largest in the country. Northfield, a small community in southeastern Minnesota, was no exception. Eight years ago, the high school graduation rate of Latinos was 36 percent and there was a rumor circulating that no Latino male had ever graduated from Northfield High School. In 2005, a group of Northfield educators and community members gathered to address this alarming fact. This brainstorming resulted in a program titled **TORCH**: Tackling Obstacles Raising College Hopes, funded by a grant from the Minnesota Office of Higher Education.

The original goal of TORCH was to improve the graduation rate of Latino students in Northfield, and within three years the Latino graduation rate had risen above 90 percent. To accomplish and maintain this success has required some inventive, targeted programming and the supportive efforts of individuals in and around the Northfield community.

Individualized engagement has been the foundation of TORCH services since the program's inception in 2005. For students to be successful, they must be invested in pursuing their goals. TORCH works to support and foster students' unique talents and aspirations. At the high school, TORCH assists students as they select classes, pushing students to explore their interests and challenge their abilities. In addition, TORCH provides opportunities for students to attend career fairs and visit colleges so that they see the possibilities available to them after high school.

The original goal of TORCH was to improve the graduation rate of Latino students in Northfield, and within three years the Latino graduation rate had risen above 90 percent.

Relationships are also essential in the TORCH model. The goal is not just to provide opportunities for students, but also to engage students in conversation, helping them to process experiences and working to understand student interests, talents, fears, challenges and future goals. A college visit does not end upon leaving campus; following up with students to learn their thoughts about courses offered, the size of a campus, the distance from home or the cost of tuition is part of developing a meaningful relationship with students and offering real support for future ambitions.

Engagement can and should look different for different students. Whether students are interested in sports or drama or an academic field, TORCH is a resource where students come to discover ways to connect with opportunities in Northfield. Exploration



2012 TORCH graduates of Northfield High School. Photo courtesy of TORCH.

and support has enabled many students to become involved in the Northfield community in new and exciting ways. Following the participation of several TORCH students in a production of "West Side Story," 15 TORCH students are now cast in the school's production of "Rock and Roll Revival." Other students are involved in speech, DECA, wrestling, soccer, track and field, and Mayor's Youth Council, as well as other extracurricular activities.

These experiences through the TORCH program help students to build resumes, readying them for post-high school responsibilities and competitively positioning them for scholarships. In addition to extracurriculars, TORCH students are expected to participate in community service and leadership activities. Efforts are consistently made to place students in positions that will stretch their expectations of themselves. Many students have volunteered as PLUS Fellows, serving as assistants to licensed teachers in summer and after-school programming with elementary students. High school students feel both empowerment and responsibility, while elementary school students benefit from interactions with positive role models possessing a similar background. TORCH students also regularly serve on community boards, councils, the school's LINK program and the TORCH Youth Advisory Board.

Academically, TORCH has been intentional in establishing high expectations of students. In 2005, most Latino students could be found in "basic" classes. TORCH staff worked with school faculty to address this issue. One contributing factor was that many Latino students had been pulled from science courses for their English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction in earlier grades, which led to extra struggles in science class work. To address this gap, changes were made in ESL programming, and fun science programs and tutoring were put in place. At the high school, many TORCH students are now found on college preparatory tracks with the support of after-school homework time and tutors from local colleges and the community.

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Value capture for transportation finance

An old idea whose time has come

By Michael Iacono

In November of last year, the Transportation Finance Advisory Committee established by Gov. Mark Dayton released its [summary report and recommendations](#) for raising additional revenue to meet anticipated needs at the state and local level in the coming decades. Mixed in among recommendations for higher motor fuel taxes, registration taxes and sales taxes to fund additional fixed guideway transit projects was a recommendation to promote the adoption of [value capture mechanisms](#) as a source of new revenue for transportation network development.

The idea is not a new one; indeed it was one of the central recommendations of the Citizens League's 2005 transportation policy report, [Driving Blind](#). A couple of years later, the Minnesota Legislature commissioned a study to examine the potential of value capture as a new option for transportation finance at the state and local level. I participated in this research, along with three University

Value capture may also have the advantage of being a relatively stable source of revenue for transportation improvements due to the lower variation of property values in response to economic downturns.

of Minnesota colleagues (David Levinson, Jerry Zhao and Adeel Lari) and a small group of graduate students. At the time, my colleagues and I believed that value capture was a policy that held a great deal of promise as a source of revenue for transportation finance, particularly at the local level. We still do, and we think that in the current climate of unmet needs, financially pressed local governments and slow economic growth, value capture mechanisms may be viewed more favorably. They also have the added advantage that many of them can be implemented within the existing administrative capacity of most local governments.

The key to understanding value capture as a policy for transportation finance is to recognize that there is a close relationship between location and land value. Specifically, locations that are particularly well served by transportation networks tend to have more expensive land, all else being equal. In these accessible locations, firms and households are willing to pay more for the benefit of having greater access to a variety of opportunities (employment, shopping, entertainment, etc.). The accessibility of a location can be measured as a function of two components: the transportation network and the spatial pattern of opportunities. A couple of years ago, a colleague and I worked on a study that estimated the value of the premium associated with higher levels of accessibility, as reflected in the market for owner-occupied

housing. We found that, controlling for a variety of housing attributes and neighborhood characteristics, doubling the accessibility of a location (defined by the number of jobs that could be reached by car within 30 minutes during the morning rush hour) increased the sale price by about 23 percent. Economic theory suggests that this premium is capitalized into the value of land, which then gets bundled into transactions of real property, including housing. The role of value capture mechanisms is to capture a share of this premium and use the revenue to pay for the transportation improvement.

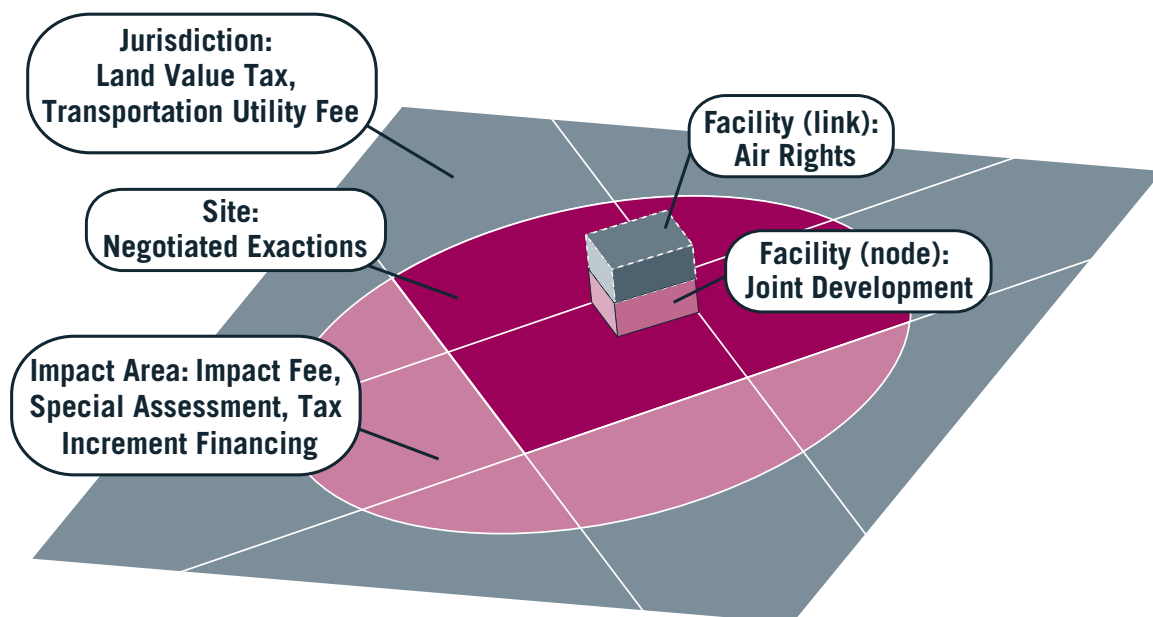
A variety of mechanisms exist for capturing the rents from transportation improvements, making value capture a relatively flexible policy for raising revenue. Although there are a number of ways to classify the different mechanisms, one of the most intuitive and straightforward is to consider whether they apply to existing property owners or to developers. Of the eight different mechanisms we identified in the [University of Minnesota study](#), there is an even split between those that apply to property owners and developers. Value capture mechanisms that apply to property owners include land value taxes, tax increment financing, special assessments and transportation utility fees. Those that apply to developers include development impact fees, negotiated exactions, joint development arrangements and sales of air rights.

The quintessential value capture mechanism and the one with the greatest intellectual pedigree is the land value tax. The popularity of the land value tax among urban and public finance economists derives from its desirable efficiency properties. Economists evaluate the efficiency of a proposed tax in terms of the amount of distortion it introduces into the economy; in other words, how much it influences the behavior of producers and consumers by raising the price of the taxed good. The land value tax is viewed as efficient because the supply of the good to which the tax applies (land) is unresponsive to changes in price.

The land value tax is perhaps best viewed not as a single type of tax, but rather as a continuum of taxes with varying degrees of emphasis on land value, as opposed to improvements (buildings). In Minnesota, as in many other parts of the country, property taxes are a primary revenue source for local governments. One can think of property taxes as a sort of partial land value tax, since the base of the tax is split evenly between land and improvements. Pure land value taxes, in which the base of the tax falls entirely on the value of land, are somewhat rare and mostly found outside the United States. However, there have been a number of local governments, most notably a number of cities in Pennsylvania, that have experimented with split-rate property taxes, in which land is taxed at a higher rate than improvements. These types of taxes are believed to encourage denser development of urban land, due to their raising the price of land relative to other inputs in the development process.



Value capture strategies can be applied individually or combined to suit specific situations.



Land value taxes and other value capture mechanisms also tend to promote equitable outcomes to the extent that they better align the responsibility for sharing the burden of financing transportation improvements with the beneficiaries of those improvements. Broadly speaking, there are three sets of beneficiaries of transportation improvements. The first set of beneficiaries is the users of transportation facilities (passengers and vehicle operators). This group typically derives the greatest benefit from transportation improvements and thus provides a justification for the imposition of fees or taxes on the users of transportation networks. Some improvements may be large enough to affect all the residents of a jurisdiction through increases in economic activity, which may translate into a larger tax base. Thus, in some cases there is a justification for imposing taxes or special charges on all of the residents of a particular jurisdiction to finance improvements. Local governments financing improvements through property taxes are an example of this. However, few individual projects have such far-reaching impacts. In most cases, the benefits from an improvement are more localized, giving rise to a third group of beneficiaries, restricted non-users. The term “restricted” refers to the fact that this group receives a disproportionate amount of benefit relative to other residents of a jurisdiction. For example, homeowners whose houses are near a new freeway interchange or rail station may receive benefits in the form of higher property prices even if they do not frequently use the improved facility. It is this group of non-user beneficiaries that value capture mechanisms target.

Value capture may also have the advantage of being a relatively stable source of revenue for transportation improvements due to the lower variation of property values in response to economic downturns. As the recent housing and financial crises demonstrated, house prices are not completely immune to the effects of recessions, but they tend to fare well in comparison to taxes based on sales or income. One can also imagine ways in which value

capture revenue sources could be made more “recession-proof.” State governments could increase local government aid transfers during periods of recession to ensure a stable flow of funds for local construction and maintenance projects. These transfers could be paid for through the sale of revenue bonds backed by increases in the state’s motor fuel taxes that are scheduled to be implemented as the economy recovers.

One of the strongest arguments in favor of the adoption of value capture mechanisms as a source of revenue for transportation is their relative ease of implementation. Implementing and managing most of these types of charges require few skills and management capabilities beyond the capacity of local government entities. Some of them, including tax increment financing, have been in use in Minnesota for extended periods of time, though they have not been applied specifically to transportation finance. Others, such as a land value tax or split-rate property tax, are simply modifications of existing tax instruments. Most would require some type of enabling legislation to ensure the legality of their use by local governments and, if applicable, state-level agencies. There have been bills introduced during the last couple of legislative sessions that would allow the state to grant these powers, but none has advanced to a vote. Even legislators representing communities who are hesitant to adopt value capture may stand to benefit, as experiments at the local level among adopting jurisdictions would generate valuable information that could be used to assess the experience with value capture. ●

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Toward a next-gen MnDOT

Suggestions for modernizing Minnesota's approach to transportation

By Charles Marohn

The role of the Minnesota Department of Transportation is changing. For decades, transportation spending has been the catalyst for quick and easy growth. Build a highway, widen some lanes, create an interchange, and the market would respond by building new subdivisions, big-box stores and strip malls. Collective public wealth could be channeled for localized gain in a way that seemingly everyone supported, whether it was on behalf of local government, the construction industry or union jobs. Everyone was getting in on the action in an approach that, in retrospect, has been eerily bipartisan.

Sixty years after this financial/social experiment began, the costs are now overwhelming. Our commitment to maintain an expansive transportation system far surpasses our financial wherewithal. Paradoxically, our projections for continued robust growth necessary to fund (take your pick) public pensions, low rates of taxation, expanded health care access, corporate subsidies and myriad other state initiatives assume we will not only maintain this system, but also continue to have new growth through its expansion. Much of the system has such low productivity in terms of the actual tax revenue returned per dollar spent that it is hard to justify even maintaining it, yet there is every expectation that we will.

As we struggle to figure out what to do, here are eight changes necessary to modernize Minnesota's approach to transportation.

1. Transportation spending is not economic development.

Speaking of transportation in terms of economic development has been a convenient way to justify all sorts of funding approaches. Unfortunately, the meme has become part of the wider culture, even though we know that good transportation systems serve productive growth, not create it. Transportation systems move goods and people. They are not catalysts for productive growth. We know how much that interchange costs so we need to stop pretending that the convenience store, pet stop and strip mall somehow justify the investment just because it makes the locals happy.

2. Transportation spending is not job creation.

Yes, DOTs employ people. Yes, construction projects employ people. When we pay people to dig a ditch and then fill it back in, we're right back where we started. When we pay people to build a highway for the sake of creating jobs, we're left with the long term financial liability of maintaining a highway. Short-term job creation may be a happy side effect of what we do, but let's not pretend that it is an end unto itself.

3. Minnesota needs a transportation budget based on what we have, not what we want to do.

We always start our budgeting process with a list of projects we feel are important. We may rank them by some objective criteria, but we start with the list of projects. This list becomes our target budget, and we proceed to undertake projects where we can get the funds. That approach is backward.

We need to start our budgeting process with our budget. How much money do we have? We then need two lists. The

first is our list of obligations. What systems do we currently have a public obligation to maintain, when does that obligation come due and how much will it be? This is a list that, in theory, never shrinks (unless we abandon some part of the system). This list needs to have everything and, once a project is completed, it goes back on the list with an updated time frame and cost.

Let's cling to reality. Transportation officials at all levels need to focus less on building for what we hope will happen tomorrow and instead start maximizing the utilization of what we've already built.

This first list will almost certainly exceed the budget by many factors, but if by some odd chance it does not, then a second list of expansion projects can be taken seriously. This second list should have everything that would be a new system: new overpass, new bridge, additional lanes, new turn lanes, new signals, etc. None of this should ever be even considered so long as the first list is running a projected deficit.

4. The most unsafe condition we can build is a STROAD. Our primary design goal must be to eliminate them.

A STROAD is a street/road hybrid. A STROAD combines elements of a street—intersections, turning traffic, dramatic speed differentials, parking, pedestrians—with the high-speed geometries of a road. It is all too often the default design of our highway system. Professionals understand that this is the most dangerous type of environment we could construct. It is also the most expensive, moves traffic in the least efficient manner possible and facilitates adjacent land use that is of very low financial value. Removing STROADs will improve travel times and reduce the system's overall costs, allowing limited resources to go further.

5. We must build differently within a city than we build outside of it.

As a licensed engineer, it is professionally embarrassing how tone deaf the industry is to productive urban settings. While we make all kinds of compromises to travel time in the seemingly endless STROAD environments on the edge of cities, we go to great lengths to resist changes to the highway geometry once we are within a city itself. Why?

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Beat the odds: Early childhood education

Investing today, creating lasting change for tomorrow

By Dr. Artika R. Tyner

Each investment in a child's life is an investment in our future. These investments yield residual benefits as our children learn to strive, excel and thrive. We have before us an opportunity to make a wise investment in the lives of many children by investing in the Children Defense Fund's efforts related to promoting early childhood education, ending childhood poverty and dismantling the cradle-to-the-prison pipeline.

By investing in early childhood education, we can have a profound impact on the cognitive development and education of children. In Minnesota, only 32 percent of all income-eligible children were enrolled in Head Start, leaving 30,561 eligible children without a quality early childhood experience. Studies have shown that participating in quality early childhood development programs has lasting positive impacts on the well-being of children, including reduced rates of teen pregnancy, better health, lower drug use, reduced criminal activity and increases in lifetime earnings. Simply investing \$1 in early education yields \$8 in future savings for the state.

By investing in ending childhood poverty, we can eliminate some of the barriers that children face like homelessness, hunger and health issues. Over the past decade in Minnesota, there has been a 62 percent increase in the number of children living in poverty. This equates to 192,000 children (15 percent of the total) living in poverty. CDF provides a number of solutions to the challenges of childhood poverty, including raising the livable wage standards to ensure that parents can earn wages that will adequately meet their family's needs and investing in food programs to ensure that children have the nutritious meals needed to perform at their best while at school.

By investing in dismantling the cradle-to-the-prison pipeline, we can disrupt the pipeline that leads to mass incarceration and disenfranchisement. In Minnesota, the cost of incarceration exceeds the cost of a quality education by 3.7 times. Additionally, it costs about \$311 per day to incarcerate a youth, in comparison to community-based alternatives to detention, which costs roughly \$60 per day. We can make a concerted effort to re-invest these "detention" dollars into early prevention and intervention strategies that take a child from the pathway to incarceration (pipeline to prison) to the pathway to success (pipeline to college).

In closing, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in his final book raised the question, "Where do we go from here: chaos or community?" If we seize the opportunity of investing in our children today, we can choose the latter. We can transform our community by proclaiming our commitment to our children.

Chilean poet Gabriela Mistral reminds us that: "We are guilty of many errors and many faults, but our worst crime is abandoning the children, neglecting the fountain of life. Many of the things we need can wait. The child cannot. Right now is the time his bones are being formed, his blood is being made and his senses are being developed. To him we cannot answer 'Tomorrow.' His name is 'Today.'"

This is a call to action, and we can no longer delay! Investing in children today will create a better future for us for years to come. ●

Artika Tyner is an attorney, educator, writer and community advocate. Dr. Tyner is a member of the Clinical Law Faculty in the University of St. Thomas Interprofessional Center for Counseling and Legal Services, Community Justice Project (CJP) Legal Clinic. She is the director of diversity and chair of the Multicultural Affairs Committee.

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tools they need to stay informed of where their field is heading and keep their skills not only current, but ahead of their field.

Our system of post-secondary education must adapt as well. In our [Phase II work](#) we heard numerous testimonials from students who felt that post-secondary institutions are not designed to meet the needs of working learners. (Despite the fact that almost 72 percent of post-secondary students reported working in 2011; 20 percent of this group worked full-time, year-round). We erect financial barriers, charging higher tuition for part-time students. In our completion focus groups, participants shared stories of employers who offer tuition reimbursement but who don't allow employees the time off to attend class. We force students to spend hours in remedial courses (for no credit) before they

can take the core classes that build their skills and have value in the labor market.

Lastly, there is the role of the individual. Some will easily embrace this way of thinking, but others will find it more difficult. The trick to living in "permanent beta," Hoffman writes, is to "never stop starting." We all need to understand that life in the 21st century economy is no longer about that first job or a degree. Those are stopping points for too many of us (as in, you get one and you're set for life, turn on the cruise control). Our career paths will most likely not look like that of prior generations. We should all expect to loop back into education—both formal and informal—and reinvest in ourselves over the course of our lifetimes. This doesn't mean coughing up tuition to get a new

credential or degree every other year. Take a free online course, teach yourself a programming language, network and share ideas with others in your field, pay attention to where the economy is headed and think of ways your skills might fit there. These sorts of things used to be attributes of only the very ambitious, but they are now required of us all.

As we move forward in our higher education work, this way of thinking will be incorporated into our work. To find out more about our higher education reform initiative visit us online at www.citizing.org/projects/highered. ●

Lindsey Alexander is a Citizens League project director and member.

In an effort to assist students in the transition to post-secondary education, TORCH has developed a PSEO (Post-Secondary Enrollment Option) program in collaboration with Riverland Community College and Carleton College. This program allows students to gain college credit, tuition free, while still in high school. Moreover, students are learning the skills and behaviors of college students. TORCH students who participate in PSEO and who obtain credits through CLEP (College Level Examination Program) testing may enter college with sufficient credits to reduce tuition cost by a semester or even a year.

Summer experiences on college campuses have served an equally critical role in preparing and energizing students for post-secondary education. In order to increase post-secondary enrollment rates, TORCH students need to be exposed to possibilities and to have personal experiences that allow them to imagine themselves as college students. One student

returned from a college summer program and told TORCH staff, “I learned that I do not want to go into business. But I also learned that I am going to college.” Another student came back to report, “I learned that I can do anything.” Each year, TORCH helps 35 to 40 students find a summer program in their interest area, access scholarships for fees and arrange transportation to and from the sessions. To date, every student but one who has participated in a summer program has gone on to pursue post-secondary training or education.

The TORCH program is constantly evolving, identifying gaps and systematically working to address those gaps. TORCH often looks to students for guidance, asking for their perspective and articulation of the challenges they face. In light of a recent workshop, TORCH is adding “parent tutoring” to the home visits already conducted. At the request of students, this tutoring will intentionally address the families’ understanding of the education

system, graduation credits and testing requirements, in addition to focusing on post-high school planning and opportunities.

Eight years ago, TORCH began as a program to address the Latino graduation rate. Since then, the program has expanded and is now working to serve all low-income, minority and would-be first generation college students. This work has been supported totally through grants, but the TORCH dream is that the program will no longer be necessary because the support has become systemic. As a nation we need to recognize the necessity of embedding support to ensure the equal opportunity for success of all students. To quote Paul Wellstone, “We all do better when we all do better.” ●

Beth Berry is the coordinator of the TORCH program at Northfield High School.

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We need great highways to connect our productive cities. Once within a city, we need to build great streets that have high financial productivity. Some of our highways that aren’t really highways at all but corridors of strip development should be turned over to local governments. The rest need a new approach that emphasizes the public’s return on investment.

6. We need to improve travel time by eliminating access points outside of cities.

For largely political reasons, transportation officials fear this change, even though there is an urgent need to do it. Access management is an enormous safety issue, one that has been glossed over with very expensive (and not very effective) half measures such as turning lanes, signals and crossovers. Providing commuters with expensive shortcuts is no longer in the budget. Our highways need to move people and goods between productive places. Anything else is an expensive luxury that simply can’t be justified.

7. We must stop using traffic projections to give a veneer of expertise to something we have proven incapable of doing: predicting the future.

Since budget realities are forcing us to confront a world where we literally build no new highways, projections become useless. Even if engineers could do them well (and it has been proven that they can’t), it is not like we can build anything new anyway. All of the equations that assume continual growth in average daily traffic are also being disproved by reality. Let’s cling to reality. Transportation officials at all levels need to focus less on building for what we hope will happen tomorrow and instead start maximizing the utilization of what we’ve already built.

8. We need to build transit, but only through a value capture funding approach.

Transit systems—particularly rail transit—have high initial costs and very low long-term maintenance costs. This contrasts with highways that have lower initial costs than rail transit but hor-

rendous long-term maintenance costs. Rail transit lends itself extremely well to a value capture funding approach, where increases in property value at transit nodes are captured to fund the initial capital costs. This is going to require not only a different mindset, knowledge base and approach from our transportation officials, but likely changes in statutes as well. Minnesota needs good transit systems but should not be trying to fund them the same way we have gotten into trouble with our highway systems: with federal grants, debt and uncorrelated taxes. ●

Charles Marohn is a Professional Engineer (PE) licensed in Minnesota, a member of the American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP) and the executive director of Strong Towns. He has a bachelor’s degree in civil engineering from the University of Minnesota’s Institute of Technology and a master’s in urban and regional planning from the University of Minnesota’s Humphrey Institute.

PERSPECTIVES

Expanding Minnesota's Conversation



“Common Sense” is nonsense

Why politicians should drop it from policy discourse

By Julie Bunn

While listening to a presidential speech, participating in a candidate forum or picking up a stack of political literature from my mailbox, I have always cringed at hearing or reading the phrase “common sense” as applied by political leaders to their leadership, solutions, plans or policy. Use of the phrase is a form of pandering and a disservice to the genuine advancement of civic discourse around policy.

“Common sense” has a rich and historically significant set of meanings. In America, the phrase is imbued with deep cultural antecedents: Thomas Paine’s 50-page pamphlet of 1776, often credited with providing the political momentum leading to the Declaration of Independence, was titled “Common Sense.”

Common sense” as used in today’s political dialogue, is tantamount to oversimplification.

You will find many book titles that begin with the phrase “common sense”: “Common Sense Parenting,” “Common Sense Forestry,” “Common Sense Investing,” etc. What approach do these books have in common? They cover “the basics,” are based on “experience”—lessons “learned the hard way”—and “don’t employ jargon and buzzwords.” The same could be said of Paine’s “Common Sense.”

Yet, “common sense,” as used in today’s political dialogue, is tantamount to oversimplification, and in this context is not a sound basis for policy decision making. My “common sense” family budget cannot be a metaphor for the national budget. Reliance only on this “common sense” can lead us to predictably wrong and disastrous results. When it comes to public policy and large complex structures, it will most certainly do so.

When employing “common sense” to describe their plans, candidates and political leaders are usually attempting to convey that it is simple rather than complex, inexpensive rather than expensive (sometimes) and non-controversial—if you, the average Minnesotan, looked at the five points of their plan, you would view it as a no-brainer. When employing “common sense” to describe their “leadership,” politicians are attempting to convey that they are “one of us,” that their leadership is grounded in social norms we all share and that they have been shaped by life experience. This emphasis on “common sense” and experience is also sometimes used by politicians to distract from the fact that they might not have any particular knowledge or expertise related to the policy areas for which they will be called on to make important decisions.

Why is the use of “common sense” in political and policy discourse problematic?

First, philosophical and legal definitions point to the inherently conservative nature of what is meant by “common sense.” From the philosopher Cicero’s “*De Oratore*” (55 BC) to the legal definitions of the 19th and 20th centuries, one dominant understanding of “common sense” has been perceptions, associations and judgments that reflect the “mentality of the crowd.”

“Common sense” skirts the accountability of facts and evidence. It conveniently evades the tough questions of a complex modern world. Reliance on it by political and policy leaders can entrench longstanding prejudice and discrimination.

Second, and most fundamentally, “common sense” is often just wrong. Research in psychology and behavioral economics has identified myriad cognitive biases (Wikipedia’s “*List of Cognitive Biases*” includes over 160) related to individual decision making, belief and behavior, social interaction and memory. These lead to serious errors of judgment, an inability to

properly evaluate risk and irrationality in decision making.

Finally, the general perception that “common sense” is a credible basis for policy making has also made it a legitimate qualification to run for public office and lead. Don’t get me wrong. Quality leaders do not need a particular type or level of formal education to be effective, or even substantive knowledge of specific policy areas prior to rising to leadership. What is essential is the recognition that the complexity of systems and structures necessitates that policy be grounded in analysis and not an individual’s preconceived ideas based on emotion or anecdote or simply experience gained from their narrow corner of the world, or what they refer to as “common sense.”

Many cognitive biases—“loss aversion” or the “selection bias” for example—are the result of evolutionary survival tools, adapted to a time when the risks and dangers we humans faced were simple and immediate. These primal biases are inadequate for an environment in which we must cope with extremely complex macro social structures and systems and in which advances in medicine, science and engineering occur very rapidly. When political leaders appeal to or make decisions based on “common sense,” they do us a disservice. Moreover, they undervalue the crucial role of knowledge and expertise in making quality decisions with regards to these complex systems.

Excellent books, among them behavioral economist Dan Ariely’s “*Predictably Irrational*” and physicist-turned-sociologist Duncan Watts’ “*Everything is Obvious: How Common Sense Fails Us*,” show how awareness of these biases and the shortcomings of “common sense” can indeed guide us to make better decisions and adopt sound policies. Let’s work to do so. ●

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Policy is not all about facts and numbers

Human needs must be considered as well

By Mariah Levison

Countless public policies fail because they do not account for psychological factors. Many psychologists posit that most of human behavior is motivated by the imperative to fulfill one of the fundamental needs that all people, in all cultures, share. Humans have physiological needs, such as for food; security needs, such as a sense that loved ones are physically safe; social needs, such as the feeling that one belongs to a group; and esteem needs, such as feeling that one can accomplish goals. Policy makers must identify the basic human need that is at the root of the problem and craft policies that will fulfill that need. Taking this approach, in addition to number crunching and other forms of analysis, is the key to successful public policy.

Humans are social animals just like wolves, and we are social animals for the same reason: evolution. Humans spent hundreds of thousands of years living in conditions in which survival was very difficult. Living and working together made survival and reproduction easier. Lest you think this was only true for cavemen, think about how well you would fare if you had to grow your own food, build your own shelter and protect your family all by yourself.

Since social connections are fundamental to our survival and reproduction, our social needs motivate a lot of our behavior. Therefore, policy makers must take this motivation into account when analyzing and addressing public issues. For example, some teenagers join gangs to satisfy social needs that are not being met in families in which the parents are incarcerated, struggling with addiction or working many jobs. Punishment is the traditional response to criminal gang behavior. The motivation to avoid punishment is often not as strong as the motivation for social connection. An effective policy to reduce gang activity must provide a sense of belonging and caring. This is why Minneapolis Mayor R.T.

Rybak wisely made connecting youth to a trusted adult, through mentorship or other means, goal No. 1 of his [Blueprint for Action: Preventing Youth Violence](#).

Weight loss is another good example. Obesity not only ruins the health, relationships and welfare of individuals, but also causes the cost of health care to soar and takes a dramatic toll on our country's

—China, France, Russia, the U.K. and the U.S.—wield enormous influence through their veto power.

This arrangement fails to reflect the role and status of newly developed countries like Brazil and India. Like people, countries (which after all are made up of people) need to feel positively about themselves and need to have other nations feel positively

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strapped finances. A traditional approach to weight loss is teaching people about diet and exercise. This approach fails to take into account social needs. Most overweight individuals have overweight family members and friends. When an individual tries to lose weight, it may strain these relationships because the family and friends may feel that this individual is now different, and perhaps better, than them. Strained social connections can be one challenge too many in the battle to lose weight. A more effective approach would provide a supportive social connection via a wellness coach or support group. Some insurance companies, such as [Medica](#), offer these options.

Obviously people don't like to feel bad about themselves, and social psychologists have demonstrated that this is true. This need is so strong that the United States and Europe's failure to address the esteem needs of developing countries is undermining the United Nations. Reform of the Security Council of the U.N. has been a hot topic for the past 20 years. Five permanent and 10 rotating members constitute the Security Council. The permanent members

about them. When countries fail to acknowledge the capacity of other countries, they run the risk of those countries seeking status in a destructive way. This phenomenon may partially explain Iran's quest for nuclear power and perhaps weapons.

If, as a society, we applied this knowledge to some of the pressing problems that we face, it would go a long way in helping us to resolve these issues. We must craft policies with this knowledge in mind and analyze failing policies in light of this principle. It isn't all about the facts and numbers. ●

Mariah Levison is a mediator and the program director at the Conflict Resolution Center. She has a master's degree in international affairs from Washington University in St. Louis and recently completed a Humphrey Policy Fellowship at the University of Minnesota.

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