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Opins & FAQs Re the State of Affairs

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Snap, crackle, pop—this cold has got to stop. Bing, bang, boom—we hope it's real soon.

Hop, skip and jump—soon we're over the hump. Not hard to glean—three weeks to wearin' o' the green.

WINDOWS on...

Bad to Worse

We have had quite a run poking fun at the mess that the City of Minneapolis has made on First Avenue North. From what we understand, today the joke simply ceases to be funny. Traffic engineers are scheduled to meet with business owners in the Warehouse District to announce their plans for First Avenue on game days. Early reports are that plans are to simply close First Avenue to all traffic beginning one hour before and running one hour after each game, and hooding all meters in the general area all day. Business owners report this has all been planned in a vacuum and if this planning has been conducted by the same people who believe curbside bike lanes are a good idea, the ban has been planned by people who live in a vacuum. It is appalling that those people who have hung in there through two stages of light rail construction and the entire First Avenue traffic nonsense were not included in the planning.

The City has proven to be quite adept at fixing problems that don't exist. Those most impacted know that auto traffic, like water, finds its own level. Clever urban car jockeys always find the cracks and seep to their destinations. If First Avenue and/or Hennepin become heavily congested or gridlocked on game days (mostly nights, by the way) people will learn to avoid them altogether.

Council Members who read this rag often bristle when they read criticism of the City because they know that we know that they are the ones with the sleeves rolled up, hearing the details and making the policy judgments. They can take heart, however, that if and when bedlam occurs the public blame is going to be placed square in the Mayor's lap. It is fact that opponents from all corners are just waiting for visible proof that the criticism that Mayor Rybak can get elected but can not govern is fair. It is too late to fix the unnecessary jam-up that will be caused by the split Fifth Street Bridge, but there is still ample time to rework First Avenue before Opening Day.

DFL RIP?

Never mind the pivotal election year. Forget the stakes given the absence of a clear message to voters and overwhelming evidence of absolute bumbling. Our early guess is that the DFL will get slaughtered come November. In St. Paul, once again, Governor Pawlenty has the DFL-controlled Legislature exactly where he wants them. They have let a proven obstructionist who has abandoned all belief in effective government, whose simplistic, offensive, euphemisms like "take a nine iron to government-run health care" shows deep disdain for the masses, in one fell swoop wipe his slate clean with the recent bonding bill discussions. Please don't misunderstand what is going on now is exactly how our state government should operate. Unfortunately, the DFL leadership fell directly into the Governor's trap by losing focus on the message that a slow economy and low interest rates beg for public works. Governor Glib got the upper hand and what is good for the state today and into the future is now excessive spending in the minds of voters across Minnesota. Instead of sitting in the driver's seat, the DFL appears to be in the principal's office.

Meanwhile, the Party apparatchiks seem to continue to bumble themselves into obscurity. Last fall the Minneapolis DFL made a historic screw-up, distributing their sample ballot to voters after the election. More recently, and we have this on very good authority, precinct caucus chairs will no longer have access to caucus attendee lists or email addresses of elected delegates. Precincts are of course the neighborhood organizing—read grass roots—the most fundamental unit of turnout and volunteer engagement. No message—no machine—turn out the lights.

WINDOWS on...continued

Linking Land Use and Transportation and Other Big Thoughts

There is considerable excitement—a palpable giddiness of sorts—in the policy work community surrounding a collaboration of the Minnesota Office of the *Urban Land Institute* and the prestigious *Brookings Institute*. Try as we might we are too stupid to understand the foundation of the work: baseline scan metrics to form Metropolitan Business Plans. Maybe it will lead to a more comprehensive way to describe our needs to the federal government and our strengths to businesses who want to grow here or move here. (Can you say Nestle?) Anyway, we can assure you that people much smarter than us—like *Caren Dewar* at ULI and metrics master *Jon Commers* of Donjek, along with the brain power and financial oomph of the public policy folks at Target—will eventually make sense of this and produce the fireworks the wonks are waiting for.



BULLETINS and BYTES...

- ◆ *Caritas Vocal Ensemble*, a group of volunteers who raise money for charitable organizations, has announced “Songs for Sixpense,” a choral concert to benefit the *Neighborhood Involvement Program* (NIP). The concert will be at St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, Logan and Franklin, overlooking Lake of the Isles. The event is “pass the hat” in nature and will be given at 7:30 pm. NIP’s mission is to strengthen individuals and the community by providing health care, education and counseling to underserved neighbors in Minneapolis.
- ◆ We join those who mourn the loss of two decent political figures who graced the local scene. *Three-term Minneapolis Mayor Charlie Stenvig* was certainly a man of his time. He represented the sentiments of people who desperately fought changes that proved inevitable (we know now how they felt). *Former DFL State Representative Linda Wejcman*, who died early this week at age 70, will be remembered for her decency and homespun grace. Decency and grace isn’t a bad legacy.

QUARKS and QUOTES...

Former Hennepin County associate *Pj Doyle* shared some fun news with us.

“Along with mystery writer Laurie R. King, I was inducted into the Baker Street Irregulars (BSI) at the international Sherlock Holmes Society’s annual dinner on Friday, January 15th. The BSI, which is the world’s premier society of Sherlock Holmes fans, selects its members by invitation only, limiting the number to 200. My “investiture” is in the name of “Ettie Shafter,” a character from the Holmes novel, “The Valley of Fear.” During the day, I am now the Managing Director over at Mixed Blood Theatre. Almost as much drama as we used to share on the 24th floor back in the 80s!”

Editor’s Note: Our heartfelt congratulations to you, Pj, on this prestigious honor!

We received considerable feedback on our mention of the Minneapolis School Board’s consideration of a new or improved headquarters. We will print your replies in a future edition, but for brevity we can consolidate them into two categories:

- (1) Are you kidding? Now with no money and growing class sizes? Why aren’t we reading about this in a real paper?
- (2) When is government going to learn that their buildings stimulate nothing? Ethan D. (he did not list his full name and we didn’t recognize the email) put it this way: “I saw your piece on building a contained school board HQ on a surface parking lot in North Minneapolis. I have lived in the UK for many years, home to Minneapolis recently for a funeral. I was struck how dead east downtown has become. Not so many years ago there were several thriving restaurants—Russell’s, Richard’s and the Little Wagon to name three—with people on the streets well into the evening. They were kept afloat mostly by two entities: the Grain Exchange and the Star Tribune, private entities. In that same proximity government has four square blocks: the federal courthouse, city hall, the county building and their jail. Thousands work there each day and thousands visit yet after five the neighborhood is dead. I hope the school board doesn’t think Minneapolis boosters are dumb enough to swallow ‘stimulus’.”