



Tourism in troubled times

By: Senator Amy Klobuchar

As we head into summer, many Minnesota families are reviewing their household budgets and wondering what kind of vacation, if any, they can take this year. Minnesota's tourism industry is wondering, too.

That's why I chaired a Senate Commerce subcommittee hearing recently on "tourism in troubled times," and held hearings in Minnesota focusing on the challenges and opportunities facing the tourism industry in the current economy.

Minnesotans understand the vital importance of tourism for our economy and way of life.

From big hotels in the Twin Cities to lodges on the North Shore, from B&B's in scenic small towns to fishing resorts on our 10,000 lakes, Minnesota has a large tourism industry. It generates \$11 billion annually for Minnesota's economy and accounts for 11 percent of the state's total private sector employment.

Many Minnesota communities have successfully developed tourism's economic potential.

Lanesboro is a good example. After being in decline for decades, this small town in southeastern Minnesota reinvented itself as a thriving tourist magnet, featuring historic buildings, charming B&B's and 60 miles of paved bike trails along the Root River and through picturesque

valleys.

But, in Minnesota and nationally, the tourism industry is feeling the impact of the severe economic downturn. Nearly 200,000 travel-related jobs disappeared in 2008. The U.S. Commerce Department forecasts the loss of an additional 250,000 jobs in 2009.

Even in the midst of a troubled economy, we can still focus on opportunities to strengthen our tourism industry.

First, there is the opportunity to make sure families know about affordable travel deals.

Although many families are rethinking their vacation plans, there are still reasonably-priced options like day trips, weekend get-aways and short vacations.

This could actually boost Minnesota tourism. Instead of traveling to Florida or California, more Minnesotans may choose to enjoy less expensive vacations that are closer to home this year.

At our Senate hearing, we heard from the CEO of Travelocity, who said that families are looking for the right vacation at the right price. It's a buyers' market, and families deserve to know what travel bargains are available.

Second, we must do more to promote the U.S. as a destination for international travel.

This is especially important for Minnesota. We share a border with Canada; we have an airport with

nonstop flights from Asia and Europe; we're home to the world-renowned Mayo Clinic; and, of course, we have the Mall of America.

In economic terms, international tourism counts as an "export." Instead of shipping our product to a customer overseas, the customer comes here to spend money on our goods and services. International visitors to the U.S. spend an average of \$4,500 per person per trip.

But things aren't going as well as they should. Since 2000, America's share of the world travel market has decreased by nearly 20 percent.

We must recapture this lost market share. As a first step, I'm cosponsoring the Travel Promotion Act, which would create a public-private partnership to market the U.S. as a premier international travel destination.

Finally, we must encourage both small and large companies to resume responsible, productive spending on business and convention travel. The highly-publicized excesses of a few bad actors should not deter companies from making legitimate investments in travel which is essential to the success of their business.

Tourism is a powerful engine for job creation and economic growth, both in Minnesota and nationally.

To revive our economy, we need to get this engine back on track and moving forward at full steam.

Missile defense: The stakes couldn't be higher

By David K. Rehbein

A young girl picking daisies opens one of the most infamous political ads ever devised. It is suggested her life is about to end violently and quickly as a nuclear mushroom cloud appears. President Lyndon Johnson intones, "These are the stakes! To make a world in which all of God's children can live, or go into the dark. We must either love each other, or we must die."

While no one in Washington has the power to mandate love, our leaders can protect us by adequately funding and deploying a national missile defense. Mocked by critics in the 1980s as a Star Wars fantasy, nobody seems to be laughing as North Korean dictator Kim Jong Il has been test-firing missiles like a kid launching fireworks on the Fourth of July. Defense Secretary Robert Gates takes the threat seriously enough to have positioned a military ground-based missile defense system to protect Hawaii from missile attack. While The American Legion applauds this decision, the nation's largest veterans service organization is concerned that the United States is not doing enough to protect us from, well, nuclear annihilation.

In 2008 delegates at The American Legion Nation-

al Convention in Phoenix unanimously passed Resolution 94. It urges the U.S. government to develop and continue to deploy a national missile defense system which is in the national interest of the United States and the American people and an essential ingredient of our homeland security.

In recent months, North Korea has repeatedly tested its nuclear weapons and long-range ballistic missile capabilities. Moreover, the Iranian President Ahmadinejad has given no indication that he plans to retract his public promises to make his country a nuclear power. While some may naively believe that these leaders are of stable mind and would be deterred by America's military might and nuclear capabilities, often overlooked is the history these rogue regimes have of proliferating weapons to terrorists.

Referring to the possibility of capturing Pakistan's nuclear weapons, a top al Qaeda commander said, "God willing, the nuclear weapons will not fall into the hands of the Americans and the Mujahideen would take them and use them against the Americans."

But despite all of this, the Obama administration has called for a \$1.62 billion reduction in missile defense for 2010, nearly a

15 percent decline from the 2009 appropriation. The 2010 Defense Authorization Bill includes a provision to reduce the number of Ground-Based Midcourse Defense Interceptors from 44 to 30. These cuts are hardly signs that Washington is committed to providing an impenetrable national missile defense.

The Heritage Foundation has produced a chilling documentary titled 33 Minutes: Protecting America in the New Missile Age. A trailer of the film can be viewed at www.legion.org. It makes the sobering point that a ballistic missile fired at the United States could reach its target in 33 minutes or less. It is a moral imperative that our leaders in Washington protect America from this catastrophic possibility.

As Gates recently said about protecting Hawaii with a ground-based system, "We are in a good position, should it become necessary, to protect Americans and American territory." But is "good" really good enough? As LBJ said of the poor daisy-picking girl, "These are the stakes."

David K. Rehbein, of Ames, Iowa, is national commander of the 2.6 million-member American Legion, www.legion.org, the nation's largest wartime veterans organization.

Rural people have a say in health care reform

By Virginia Wolking

Cafe owners, farmers, the butcher and employees of small businesses in my town agree: the time is now for health care reform. And I've heard the same message from all over the Great Plains.

Rural people must be involved to get what we want from health care reform. As senators across the nation search for solutions to rural America's health care challenges, they need to hear from rural Americans.

You can make a difference by calling or writing to your senator today.

Rural people know that our health care system can work better.

Owner-operated farms, ranches and small businesses dominate the rural economy. Reform must provide options, including a public health insurance option, for small businesses and their employees. Rural America also needs health care reform that provides quality, affordable options to everyone, treats rural providers fairly and creates incentives to keep our doctors, nurses and other providers in our small towns. Health care reform will also spur entrepreneurial rural development and

stimulate our economy.

A public plan option would increase competition in the insurance industry while also expanding choice and lowering costs.

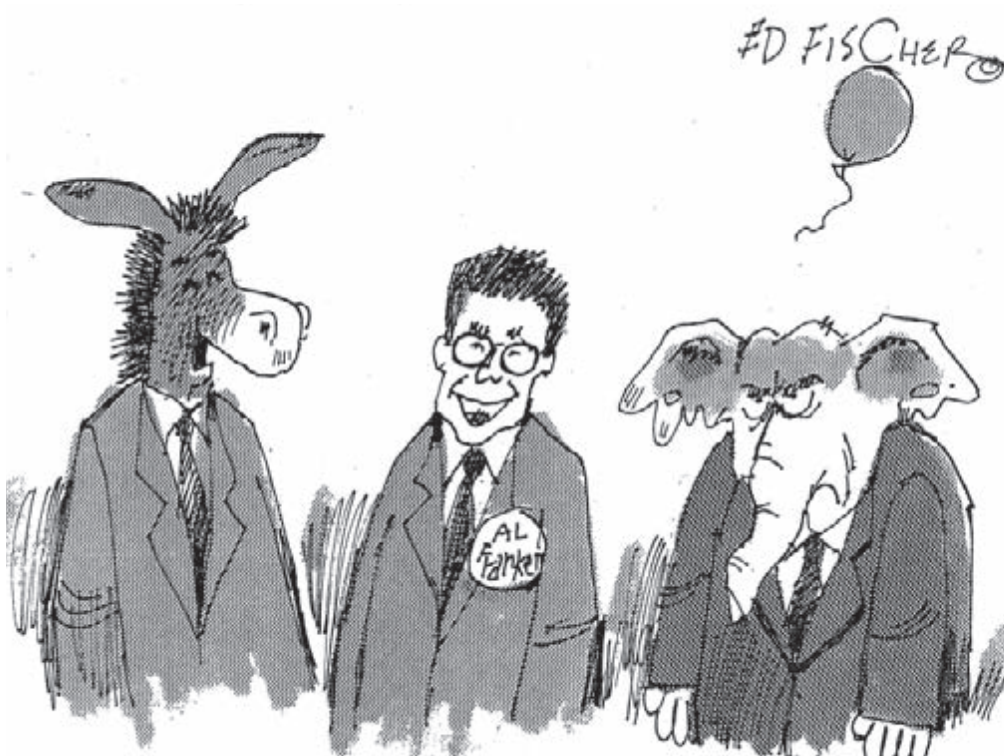
When you write to your senator, be sure to include your own experiences with health care and the importance of reform to your community.

Help us track our progress toward health care reform by emailing virginia@cfra.org or calling 402-687-2103 x1017 to inform us that you wrote.

Write to your senator online at: <http://www.cfra.org/09/health-care>

Rural Americans have a powerful voice in the health care reform debate.

Virginia Wolking is with the Center for Rural Affairs and can be reached at virginia@cfra.org. The Center for Rural Affairs was established in 1973 by rural Nebraskans concerned about family farms and rural communities. They work to strengthen small businesses, family farms and ranches, and rural communities.



Todd County comp plan questions

By Nathan Burkett
Todd County Administrator

Todd County's Comprehensive Planning committee is encouraging further citizen engagement in completion of the Comprehensive Plan.

This is the second in a series of questions the Comprehensive Plan Committee is issuing to gather public input.

Land Use and Natural Resources

1. What is the most important land use related is-

sue in Todd County?

2. What steps do you feel should be taken to keep agricultural and rural development compatible?

3. What is the most important natural resource in Todd County?

4. How do you use Todd County's natural resources?

Citizens are encouraged to respond to these questions by:

1. Emailing compplan@co.todd.mn.us
2. Going to www.co.todd.mn.us and accessing the "Comprehensive Plan Survey" link
3. Calling 320-533-4631 and leaving a message
4. Sending a letter to: Comp Plan Committee, 347 Central Ave, Suite 5, Long Prairie, MN 56347.

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Staples World

Established in 1890. USPS 518-760
©2009 Devlin Newspapers, Inc.
Published Thursdays by Devlin Newspapers, Inc.
Office located at 224 4th Street NE
Periodicals postage paid at Staples, Minnesota 56479.

Mailing Address: P.O. Box 100
Telephone: (218) 894-1112 - Fax: (218) 894-3570
Toll Free: 1-888-894-1112
www.staplesworld.com - E Mail: info@staplesworld.com

Official Newspaper for:
City of Staples, City of Aldrich,
Staples Motley School District,
Freshwater Education District and Todd County.

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Local: (Todd, Wadena, Morrison, Cass Counties) \$33 per year
Minnesota: \$37 per year - Out of State: \$41 per year
Foreign: \$47 per year Student Rate: (Sept. through Apr./in state) \$24
There is a \$5 charge for address change from local to out of state.

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