

# Opinion

## OUR VIEW

### Another survey worthy of Duluthians' attention

Like community surveys and studies that came before it, the "Soul of the Community" study, being released today, can be as valuable to Duluth and our future as we decide to make it.

Considering its suggestions that our region, like other regions, can add jobs, boost the bottom line and benefit in other ways from being more welcoming, from expanding nightlife and from strengthening residents' emotional attachments to the place they call home, community leaders and residents alike can take notice.

That can start today when folks from the Duluth Superior Area Community Foundation and others lead an afternoon's worth of conversations about the study, its findings and what to do with them. The get-together at Teatro Zuccone will follow a presentation from 10 a.m. to noon.

The three-year survey of residents was conducted by the national polling outfit Gallup for the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. Duluth-Superior was one of 26 communities, all formerly home to newspapers owned by the Knight brothers, that were surveyed.

High levels of community attachment equate to strong economic growth, the study found, among other things. Strengthening residents' attachment to their commu-

nity can be achieved through better nightlife offerings, through wider inclusiveness and from the appreciation of a place's physical beauty.

Duluth's natural features and strong sense of place already are strengths and can be built upon — especially when it comes to ongoing efforts to prevent young people from moving away.

"This is where we're starting. This is not the end," Katherine Loflin, the study's lead consultant, told the News Tribune this week about today's release. "We want the true voice of the community to come out ... so we can get a true picture of place from residents. (Then you can) embrace who you think you are as a place."

Duluth Mayor Don Ness sees value in digging deeper into the study's findings and in using them to open a dialog. "It's a snapshot of perspective and perceptions," he said. "There's value. (This) can serve as a starting point for a broader discussion.

"For me it's less about the report and more about the discussions that'll start (today)," the mayor said.

"I think it will also help us explore openness and inclusiveness and ways we can be a more welcoming community," Duluth Superior Area Community Foundation President Holly C. Sampson said.

All are things worth exploring.

## READERS' VIEWS

### Standard & Poor's not qualified to rate public debt

Even though my background includes some time in the investment business, I don't claim to be an expert. But I feel compelled to make some judgments once in a while.

During the 2007-08 economic-distress period, the bonds of many institutions, public and private, previously rated highly by Moody's and Standard & Poor's, were all of a sudden in financial jeopardy. It was evident that no matter how the bonds were rated, the companies made some mistakes, maybe a lot of mistakes.

All of a sudden, after federal efforts to come up with a budget, and an attempted raise of the spending limit, which resulted in a decision somewhat tenuous and short-term, Standard & Poor's made a judgment call that the federal bonds should be lowered from the AAA rating.

Although I personally often disagree with decisions by Congress, I am also unhappy by Standard & Poor's judgment call. I feel strongly Standard & Poor's really is not qualified to make such decisions. It obviously doesn't want to be caught like it was during the early part of the recession. What if Congress succeeds later on to come up with a sensible result? (Let's hope so.) Will Standard & Poor's be caught again?

I am not aware that Moody's has followed Standard & Poor's lead.

Maybe it is less "moody" than the other.

PETER H. SNEVE  
DULUTH

### Cravaack hasn't done anything to create jobs

A letter writer on Aug. 20 said U.S. Rep. Chip "Cravaack won the election; it's time to move on." The writer then launched a diatribe upon our former congressman, Jim Oberstar.

Wasn't it interesting that in the same day's newspaper, a news story told how Oberstar planted the seed with owners of AAR Aircraft Services, an aircraft maintenance provider, to expand to Duluth, creating up to 250 high-paying jobs. The potential jobs include airframe and power plant mechanics, sheet metal workers, interior specialists and quality-control inspectors. Duluth is competing with a few other cities for this potential job windfall.

Wouldn't it be fair to assume that with Congressman Oberstar's stature, transportation expertise and past successful efforts at creating jobs for our region, we would have a better chance at this opportunity?

Oberstar accomplished so much for Northeastern Minnesota. And just what has Cravaack done, especially for job creation?

JUNE KIMBALL  
DULUTH

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## CARTOONIST'S VIEW



Mike Keefe / Cagle Cartoons

## IN RESPONSE

### Excelsior Energy project is an important energy option for state

#### Julie Jorgensen and Tom Micheletti

As co-CEOs of Excelsior Energy, we are writing to clear up inaccuracies and misconceptions about our company contained in an editorial yesterday (Our View: "Taxpayers have right to answers on Excelsior") and in recent News Tribune articles (namely Sunday's "Millions in public money spent, but power plant still just a dream," and Monday's "Project seeks lifeline in more funding, new fuel source").

The Mesaba Energy Project, under development by Excelsior Energy, is a unique public/private partnership selected through competitive solicitations for state and federal funding awards due to its contribution to national and state energy security and environmental goals.

We at Excelsior Energy take our obligations under our public/private partnerships very seriously. We provide complete transparency to our funding partners as to how we use the funds provided, complying fully with the same rules, regulations and reporting requirements that apply to all other recipients. We maintain books and records that comply with both generally accepted accounting principles and the rigorous federal contracting requirements of the U.S. Department of Energy. We participate in weekly review meetings with the Department of Energy and are subject to annual external audits and periodic routine reviews and in-depth audits by the federal government.

The Iron Range Resources and Rehabilitation Board, or IRRRB, provided a portion of the project's funding in the form of a loan to Excelsior under express conditions that the funds be used only to reimburse documented project-development costs. These

conditions were complied with by Excelsior and strictly enforced by IRRRB. The project has not received funding from IRRRB for more than four years.

The funding and support from our state and federal partners has been critical to bringing the project to a very significant stage of development. The Mesaba Project is the only available alternative to provide new coal-fueled power to meet Minnesota's needs. All other new coal resources are subject to a state ban, as are new nuclear resources. Recently, the project received the first site and route permit issued by the state of Minnesota in more than 30 years for such a base-load power plant.

Because of its advanced technology, the plant will all but eliminate the pollution normally associated with coal. It will do so by cleaning up the synthesis gas produced from coal prior to using it. The flexibility to use natural gas first, and switch to coal when market prices dictate, provides a hedge to protect Minnesota consumers and businesses.

The high costs and extraordinarily long timeline to permit a base-load power facility, as reported in the articles, are unfortunate realities in today's business climate. The costs and risks of complying with myriad regulations and requirements to obtain dozens of permits from multiple state and federal agencies in order to construct a facility are a major obstacle to building even the cleanest plant using the most state-of-the-art technology.

Proposed new coal plants around the country have spent similar amounts, and in some cases double or more the amount, cited by the News Tribune before being cancelled or put in the "too hard" pile.

The regulatory logjam on clean, new facilities does nothing to enhance our environment and harms any effort to create or maintain jobs in our state and

nation. It threatens our global competitiveness in the long run.

The project is nearing the end of this complex governmental-approval process and has much to show for it. We have certainly faced many challenges, as have many other entrepreneurial companies in this continuing recession. We believe the economy will turn the corner; and when it does, the state will need clean, domestic energy supplies to power the recovery.

Meanwhile, Minnesota's electric supply options are shrinking. The low-cost coal plants, surplus hydro and nuclear resources that have kept rates low in the past, can't be relied on for our future. Many old coal plants currently serving Minnesota are expected to be shuttered in the next five years because they can't meet new pollution-control requirements.

The hydroelectric power that Minnesota utilities have been planning to import from Canada may not come to fruition, as the costs and feasibility of the proposed new dams were brought under attack in a July report by the Manitoba Public Utilities Board. The cost of complying with nuclear regulations is on the rise after the nuclear crisis in Japan. Wishing that wind and conservation were enough is not a robust plan for the future.

We are proud to lead a small Minnesota business trying to put people back to work. We would like to thank all of the policymakers at the federal, state and local level who have afforded this project support through its ups and downs. We will continue to work to earn your trust and confidence. In addition, we will continue to advance the development of the Mesaba Energy Project and advocate for it as a clean, cost-effective, in-state option to meet Minnesota's electric power needs.

JULIE JORGENSEN and TOM MICHELETTI are co-CEOs of Excelsior Energy Inc.

## READER'S VIEW

### GOP greed shines through in Buffett response

The GOP response to Warren Buffett's comment showed the typical Republican stance of greed and selfishness, wanting and willing for everyone else to make sacrifices and be account-

able ("GOP rebuffs Buffet's call for higher taxes on the rich," Aug. 17).

The GOP seems more interested in taking care of itself than acting in the best interest of America, which is so un-American and Republican. It would be comical if it was not such a sad day for themselves and America!

The GOP acts more like the whiskey rebellion than the real Tea Party, which was about taxation without representation.

Warren Buffet had it right and believes in a shared sacrifice, not all on the backs of the working class and the most vulnerable members of society.

JOHNNIE FORREST  
KEEWATIN

## Readers' Views and Local Views

Letters to the editor are a critical part of the community dialogue, and the News Tribune attempts to publish all letters of opinion meeting our requirements.

Letters are limited to 300 words, must be the original work of the author and must be exclusive to the News Tribune. Letters are edited for style, space, accuracy and civility. Elections-related letters in support of or in opposition to specific candidates are limited to 200 words.

Letter writers are limited to one published submission every 30 days. With rare exceptions, the News Tribune does not publish poetry; letters that are anonymous, libelous or attack other writers; consumer-complaint let-

ters; thank-you letters; or letters generated by political or special-interest campaigns.

We will consider exclusive Local View columns of 600 words or fewer. Authors should possess unique insights, and their commentaries should demonstrate greater knowledge of their subject than letters.

E-mail submissions to: letters@duluthnews.com.

Mail to: Readers' Views, Duluth News Tribune, 424 W. First St., Duluth, MN 55802.

Fax to: (218) 720-4120.

Include a full name, address and daytime phone number. Only names and hometowns will be published.

## Doonesbury

