



# JOURNAL

A Public Policy Monthly from the Citizens League

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## Minnesota's CriMNet helps close the information gap to improve public safety

The information-sharing program maximizes limited criminal justices resources

by Michael Campion and Dale Good

Ask the average Minnesotan how technology impacts criminal justice today and the response is likely to paint a picture not unlike the popular television series CSI.

Most people expect that any possible bit of information a justice professional might need is merely a mouse click away, thanks to powerful computer systems, giant databases of information, and broad access for criminal justice personnel, particularly law enforcement.

Not true. The reality is that the criminal justice system, like other sectors of society, is slow to change and things conceived of in your wildest imaginings are only possible in the movies.

Criminal justice practitioners do have much greater access to information electronically than even 10 years ago, but the system doesn't communicate as it should. Information is housed in agency databases that are not broadly accessible, and criminal justice agencies must make capital investment decisions that equate to choosing between a squad car and an electronic records management system.

That's the bad news. The good news is the situation is steadily improving. Minnesota has a one-of-a-kind resource to bridge the information gaps between agencies and help make more information available to criminal justice practitioners: the CriMNet program.

### Statewide information sharing

CriMNet is a state-level program that works to provide complete and accurate criminal justice information to

professionals in law enforcement, the courts and corrections. It is part of the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension (BCA), and the staff works closely with state and local agencies, as well as two statutorily created groups, to define agencies' primary information and technology needs, offer solutions, and set priorities for devoting state resources to achieve specific solutions.

In some cases the solution may simply involve changing a common business practice, for example, capturing fingerprints electronically rather than on paper cards. In other cases, the solution requires collecting new data or implementing a secure technology that allows information to move

among agencies electronically.

CriMNet is not a single database or technology solution. It exists to coordinate information sharing from a statewide and potentially nationwide viewpoint—known as the “enterprise” view—so that systems can work together. This requires the development of statewide standards for technology and business practices. The more agencies can work together and in a similar manner, the easier it is to share criminal justice information.

### Erasing geographic boundaries

Minnesota is unique in that it has the CriMNet office to coordinate criminal justice information-sharing efforts. Though there are efforts in other states to integrate criminal justice information, the work tends to be done

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# CONNECTIONS

Building a League of Citizens



Citizens League member Ben Cox summarizes his table's conversation at the September 7 Future for Policymaking in Minnesota wrap up event.

## Citizens League Annual Meeting

Monday, October 23 at the Milwaukee Depot  
5:30 p.m. reception, 6:30 p.m. program, 7:30 p.m. dessert

Join friends and neighbors from down the street and across the aisle at the Citizens League Annual Meeting. Following a brief (we promise!) business meeting, we'll share key findings from the Minnesota Anniversary Project polling done this year. Then, we'll ask you to weigh in on what we need to do to make Minnesota stronger for all Minnesotans.

There's no charge and everyone's welcome—members and non-members alike—so bring your friends and neighbors. This is a great chance to meet fellow members and introduce others to the Citizens League's critical public policy work.

The annual meeting is free and open to everyone! RSVP online at [www.citizensleague.net/events/upcoming](http://www.citizensleague.net/events/upcoming) or call 651-293-0575, ext. 16.

## 22nd Annual Conference on Policy Analysis: Visions for Minnesota's Future

Wednesday, October 18 at the University of Minnesota,  
St. Paul Campus Continuing Education and Conference Center

The Citizens League is co-sponsoring the 22nd Annual Conference on Policy Analysis. Program sessions provide an opportunity for analysts and policy makers to gain insight into current trends and changes in the policy-making environment; explore emerging policy issues; and share ideas with policy analysts from around Minnesota. Topics covered include universal health care, property tax reform, the impact of immigration on public policy in Minnesota, wind energy, land use and housing costs, public education financing, politics and the media, and socio-economic disparities in Minnesota.

Registration: \$125 before October 4/\$140 after, \$25 for fulltime students  
Register online at [www.cce.umn.edu/policyanalysis](http://www.cce.umn.edu/policyanalysis) or contact Electra Sylva, 612-624-3708, [conferences5@cce.umn.edu](mailto:conferences5@cce.umn.edu).

## New members, recruiters and volunteers

### New and Rejoining Members

John Bergstrom  
Sally Burns  
Darryl Carter  
John Cairns  
Thomas Crosby  
Jeff Falk  
John Farrell  
David Fey  
Sieglinde Gassman  
Amy Herter  
Ann Johnson  
Margaret O'Neill-Ligon  
Todd Peterson  
Brian Yunis

### Firms and Organizations

ADC Foundation  
Allan Baumgarten  
Allianz Life Insurance Company of North America  
Andersen Corporation  
Association of Metropolitan School Districts  
Best Buy Co. Inc.  
Capitol Connections  
Catholic Charities  
CDC Associates  
CenterPoint Energy/Minnegasco  
City of Woodbury  
Cogent Consulting, Inc.  
Comcast  
Gray Plant Mooty Foundation  
Halleland Lewis Nilan & Johnson  
Medtronic Foundation  
Metropolitan State University  
Minnesota Association of Realtors

Minnesota Community Foundation  
Minnesota Department of Education  
Office for Public Engagement, University of Minnesota  
Park Midway Bank  
Pohlad Family Foundation  
Public Financial Management  
Presentation Social Justice Committee  
Robins, Kaplan, Miller & Ciresi  
Securian Foundation, supported by Securian Financial Group and its affiliates  
Sherburne & Wadleigh Ltd  
U.S. Bancorp Foundation  
Villager Communications  
Volunteers of America  
Weber Shandwick Worldwide  
Workers' Comp Reinsurance Association

### Recruiters

Stan Donnelly  
William Bronn  
Scott Burns  
Diane Tran

### Volunteers

Paul Carter  
Cal Clark  
Tanessa Greene  
Keith Halleland  
Katie Kelley  
Mary Pickard  
Eric Schubert  
Cynthia Scott  
Nena Street

## We need your help—contribute to the MAP 150 agenda for Minnesota

This fall, the Citizens League is conducting a scientific poll to find out what Minnesotans think about citizenship and policy. We've also set up an online version of the survey so we can find out what our members think. The results of both surveys will help us determine the MAP 150 policy agenda. Go to [www.map150.org](http://www.map150.org) to complete the survey. If you'd prefer to take the survey by phone, call Brian at 651-293-0575 ext. 10 to set up a time.



## A civics lesson about a civics lesson

From democratic ridicule to democratic relevance

by Sean Kershaw

Welcome to the Democracy Bowl! **Question 1:** How many Americans does it take to screw up a civics test?

**Answer:** a statistically valid sample of 1,200.

According to a recent Zogby poll, 77 percent of the public could name two of the seven dwarfs but only 24 percent could name two of the U.S. Supreme Court justices. In Minnesota, fewer than 10 percent could name Congressmen Mark Kennedy or Martin Sabo. (Perhaps our leaders just need “rhymier” nicknames.)

**Question 2:** How many experts does it take to misread these results? **Answer:** just enough.

Within days, local *Star Tribune* columnist Doug Grow and other commentators seized this red meat and rendered their verdicts. Grow concluded: “Twin Cities’ minds don’t seem wired for participatory democracy.”

Wow. That’s a big depressing conclusion to reach—and a misguided one too.

Don’t get me wrong. As someone who has followed politics since I was a kid the way other (more normal) people follow sports, these findings are hard to imagine. There is clearly no *excuse* for this civic ignorance. But there might be an *explanation* for it—and an opportunity to improve Minnesota in the process.

It’s not that citizens are disinterested in democracy and policy-making; it’s that democracy and policy-making seem disinterested in citizens.

We shouldn’t be surprised then when citizens appear less engaged. It’s like Harvey Fierstein said in the movie “Torch Song Trilogy:” “You cut me out of your life and then you blamed me for not being there.”

As civic and policy leaders, have we done the same thing to citizens? Before we write off citizens as incapable of engaging in democracy, let’s give them more genuine opportunities to participate as policy-makers and active citizens.

### The true voice

The Zogby survey didn’t ask people if they *valued* participatory democracy, an essential question we need to answer before concluding

It’s not that citizens are disinterested in democracy and policy-making; it’s that democracy and policy-making seem disinterested in citizens.

that they aren’t capable of it. And when this Congress, which has been in session the fewest number of days since the 1950s—despite the fact that we are at war—chooses to spend its precious time on issues like flag burning instead of a dozen more pressing issues, should we be surprised when citizens tune out? (The dwarfish nicknames of Sleepy and Dopey actually seem fitting.)

At the Citizens League, our experiences seem to contradict Zogby’s findings. As part of our Minnesota Anniversary Project (MAP 150), we talked to hundreds of Minnesotans about their policy priorities and ideals. Their replies offer reasons for real optimism.

True, citizens are alienated from politics and politicians, and they feel more stressed for time than ever. And when they participate through traditional means like public hearings they feel they aren’t really heard.

But Minnesotans are passionate about the future of their families, their communities, and their state. They understand that our future economic success and quality of life depend on addressing issues like education and healthcare. They understand that our current solutions aren’t working, and they acknowledge that they share a responsibility for producing better outcomes. But when they look around, they don’t see a productive opportunity to contribute to policy-making and politics. It’s a case study right out of Albert Hirschman’s book, “Exit, Voice and Loyalty.” Are we listening? Minnesotans are exiting civic life in a state they love.

### A new relevance

Democracy is more than a grand ideal. It presumes the daily experiences of citizens matter: that these experiences should improve and inform their capacity to govern. Democracy must be relevant to be sustainable. Our task at the Citizens League is to create more opportunities for citizens to govern in their daily lives. In doing so, we also make it easier for Minnesota’s democracy to achieve its ideal.

What if public policies gave citizens more opportunities to be decision makers by providing real information and incentives to stay healthy and make good transportation decisions; or providing ways to engage in policy issues at work through programs like the Pizza and Politics series we’re doing with corporate partners like General Mills? What if policy conversations were more interesting and accessible, like our Policy and a Pint program jointly sponsored by MPR’s The Current?

What if we gave citizens new political options: reform the caucus system; provide opportunities to participate in the legislative process through new online mechanisms; develop new voting mechanisms like instant runoff voting; or, create more diverse legislative districts through a new apportionment process?

What if “civic engagement” was more than volunteering and voting? What are the civic dimensions of being a good parent or a good neighbor? What if the next Zogby survey asked if you knew the recycling date in your neighborhood, or how many families you know have someone stationed in Iraq?

What we need is a bold new “No *Citizen Left Behind*” approach to policy-making. Because we can no longer afford to stand idly by while Minnesota’s citizens head for the exits of our civic spaces. We, and they, are capable of so much more. ●

Sean Kershaw is the Executive Director of the Citizens League. He can be reached at [skershaw@citizensleague.net](mailto:skershaw@citizensleague.net) or 651-293-0575x14. You can comment on this Viewpoint at Sean’s blog: [www.citizensleague.net/blogs/sean](http://www.citizensleague.net/blogs/sean).

### What the public thinks we have



### What we have today



### What we had in 1999



project by project or regionally rather than statewide.

Why is that important? We know that issues of public safety transcend geographic boundaries. The impact of a child's abduction on a community is no less severe simply because it occurs in Minneapolis rather than Chisholm. A judge needs to know a defendant's full criminal history in other communities and in other states to make appropriate bail decisions. And missing pieces may significantly change the decision a justice practitioner makes.

In Minnesota, 1,100 criminal justice agencies spend nearly \$5 billion every two years to do their work—including law enforcement, prosecutors, public defenders, corrections, and court personnel at both the state and local level. Only a fraction of that investment is devoted to information sharing, yet so much of the work relies on access to the right information. And the public expects that the right information will be available—a reasonable expectation given the technological capabilities today.

The problem is that agencies don't have access to all the available capabilities because other priorities have consumed their resources or because they are considering their own needs and not the overall needs of the justice enterprise.

A program like CriMNet is certainly not the only solution. The real work in public safety is done by the agencies at the local level. But it's important to understand the obstacles to sharing information and to assess what information sharing can do to help agencies with their day-to-day work. Unless information sharing is viewed from a full-system perspective, agencies will

continue to create systems and manage data to meet their own needs, without knowing that a small adjustment could provide them access to other agencies' information and allow other agencies to access theirs.

The availability of more complete criminal histories also benefits hundreds of thousands of non-criminal justice users who need background checks for foster and daycare providers, hospital workers, apartment managers, teachers, and security professionals, among others.

The case surrounding Poirier's abduction, and the ultimate arrest and conviction of Donald Blom for her kidnapping and murder, illustrated exactly how important it is to have complete and accurate records. Blom had a lengthy history of convictions for sex offenses, but because he used a number of aliases and false dates of birth, many of those convictions might not have been properly included in his criminal history, or other offenses may have been committed under an alias unknown to criminal justice agencies.

This gap in information had a clear impact on decisions made as Blom moved through the criminal justice system. Filling those gaps became the initial focus of the CriMNet program office.

#### A more efficient system

In 2000, the outlook on information integration in Minnesota was dismal at best. Though Minnesota criminal justice agencies were collecting significant quantities of information, the information tended to stay in the local agencies. We didn't have effective methods to share the information statewide and we had a number of gaps in the information available electronically.

Today, through the efforts of CriMNet stakeholders and dedicated criminal justice personnel at both the state and local level, there have been a number of significant improvements and we have many resources that didn't exist six years ago:

- A statewide predatory offender database containing records on about 18,000 offenders.

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#### Katie's Law the catalyst

The CriMNet Program staff first began its work in 2000 when the Legislature provided funding for information integration efforts as part of Katie's Law, named for Katie Poirier, the teen abducted from a convenience store in Moose Lake.

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- A statewide prison and probation database accessible to criminal justice professionals and victims.
- All but 30 of the smallest counties can electronically submit and retrieve “mug shots” from a central data file of some 748,000 photos.
- All 87 counties can electronically submit fingerprints, reducing the use of paper cards to nearly zero, enabling positive identification by the BCA in hours instead of months.
- Today the BCA processes 155,000 fingerprints per year electronically, reducing incomplete records.
- An integrated search service allows criminal justice professionals to search several databases in one place, a critical piece that saves time and enhances the accuracy of records.

While many of these advancements involved information used by criminal justice agencies, the availability of more complete criminal histories also benefits hundreds of thousands of non-criminal justice users who need background checks for foster and daycare providers, hospital workers, apartment managers, teachers and security professionals, among others. The results lead to enhanced integrity in those professions and safer communities.

## Protecting security and privacy

There are two aspects absolutely essential to all of this work: security and data prac-

tices, which truly go hand-in-hand. As we move toward greater access to information both for criminal justice professionals and the public, it's more important than ever that we ensure we're adhering to appropriate data practices.

We have a responsibility to the individual whose data is stored in the criminal justice system to make that information only available to those who have a legal right to it. And we have a responsibility to provide criminal justice agencies with the information they need to do their jobs without inundating them with all the information they could possibly have.

That balance is a careful one and requires significant consideration. And both of these objectives require a secure network—one that criminal justice agencies and the public can be confident will properly route information and thwart attempts to compromise it. While we have the technical capability to provide that network—and we are, through resources at the BCA and the Office of Enterprise Technology—we need to take the extra step of creating policies, agreements, and procedures to assure we're considering all of the risks to the integrity of that secure network.

The CriMNet office is recommending that any new system implemented to share or gather information electronically undergo a “Privacy Impact Assessment,” which measures how the system may affect individuals' privacy. A standard method for

We have a responsibility to the individual whose data is stored in the criminal justice system to make that information only available to those who have a legal right to it.

conducting this assessment is available to all agencies, along with recommendations for addressing any privacy issues identified.

Despite the progress we've made toward integrating criminal justice information in Minnesota, we still have work to do. The CriMNet office has laid out an aggressive strategy for the next several years to provide agencies with greater access to the specific information they need.

The staff of the CriMNet office is still working to identify other gaps in the information system. For example, the staff is currently studying the different processes agencies use for entering and managing warrants. That study will result in recommendations for standard business practices, focusing on the best practices used by Minnesota agencies. There is a similar analysis underway to establish technical standards to guide agencies as they consider new systems to manage information electronically.

## Speed, flexibility, and efficiency

CriMNet is also working to develop the infrastructure that will effectively serve the needs of criminal justice agencies. In practical terms, that translates into customizing information so officers at a traffic stop can access what they need on mobile wireless devices, judges can view a complete criminal history before they pronounce sentence, and probation analysts can spot trends and recommend best practices to reduce recidivism.

We're also working to eliminate the need for the manual paper processes that still dominate the criminal justice system.

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## More investment *and* a more productive government

Growth & Justice founder says there's still life in the debate about taxes

by Joel Kramer

In his Viewpoint column in the August/September issue of the *Minnesota Journal*, Sean Kershaw argued that we should focus our policy discussion energy on the productivity of our public dollars, not on the “tired arguments about cutting or raising taxes that have dominated our policy conversations for the past unproductive 10 years.”

There are four big problems with this argument.

*It assumes that our choice is either/or.*

Why can't we talk about investing more in education, health, and infrastructure and having a more productive government? Just look through the pages of your *Minnesota Journal* over the past year, and count the number of instances in which writers talking about reform also said that more funding was needed.

*It sets up the straw man that more investment means investing in current programs that aren't getting a return.*

Growth & Justice's Invest for Real Prosperity strategy emphasizes investing only in those areas, and in those ways, that promise a solid return. For example, the return we receive from ensuring that all young children have access to quality early childhood education and good health care

Why can't we talk about investing more in education, health, and infrastructure and having a more productive government?

is well documented—yet we are headed south in the wrong direction on these issues in Minnesota because we have wrapped ourselves in a fiscal straitjacket.

*It calls a halt to the “tired arguments” after one side (the tax-cutters) has won many victories.*

Just when the public is beginning to realize that it has been sold a bill of goods based on demonizing government, and that the shrinking of government in Minnesota has undesirable consequences, we are being asked to drop the subject.

*It ignores the real impact that tax cutting has had on who pays for government.*

When Minnesota cut income taxes on high earners, the public was not willing to live with the full consequence, so we have raised money elsewhere—through tuition increases that outstrip financial aid and through higher property taxes, for example, which shifted the costs more onto struggling working families. If we drop the “tired” debate about taxes, we make permanent the conservatives' achievement of shifting the cost of government more onto the backs of those who have less.

We fully support and want to join the Citizens League in examining how to make government more innovative, creative, and productive. And we invite the Citizens League to join Growth & Justice in discussing the need to invest more in Minnesota's future so that we all prosper, and how to pay for it fairly. For more information on our Invest for Real Prosperity strategy, visit [www.growthandjustice.org](http://www.growthandjustice.org). ●

To read Sean Kershaw's thoughts on Growth & Justice's Invest in Real Prosperity campaign, go to [www.citizensleague.net/blogs/sean/archives](http://www.citizensleague.net/blogs/sean/archives) and scroll down to July 2006. There are several posts, beginning on July 21. Joel Kramer is Founder and Executive Director of Growth & Justice.

## CriMNet

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This requires capturing the information at the incident level electronically and moving it through to the court system. An electronic charging application that would allow agencies to move criminal complaints from the law enforcement agency to the court is currently in exploratory stages.

Today, the paper process requires criminal justice professionals to physically move paper around their jurisdiction, which can mean considerable time off the road for a sheriff's deputy or a delay in court proceedings because documents require physical signatures before they can move forward. E-charging would replace this manual, time-consuming process and allow for the transmission of documents—and signatures—securely and electronically.

While we'd love to promise that integrating criminal justice information will prevent another Katie Poirier or 9/11, we know that no one can prevent every crime. But by working to share more information and to fulfill the public's expectation of agencies' access to criminal justice information, we can solve crimes faster—reducing the number of potential victims, making the execution of justice more efficient, and providing better information for corrections and treatment to keep people in the system from re-offending.

That allows justice practitioners to focus on their jobs instead of spending valuable time searching for the information they need. And that improves public safety for Minnesotans. ●

Michael Campion is the commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Public Safety and chair of the Criminal and Juvenile Justice Information Policy Group, the statutory agency charged with oversight of the CriMNet Program Office. Dale Good is the executive director for the CriMNet Program and former chief information officer for the state court system.

The November issue of the *Minnesota Journal* will be a special MAP 150 edition.

Look for it in early November (a little later than usual)!



## Building a road map for Minnesota's future

MAP 150 to test the conclusions of its field research with a scientific poll. Look for the results in the November *Journal*

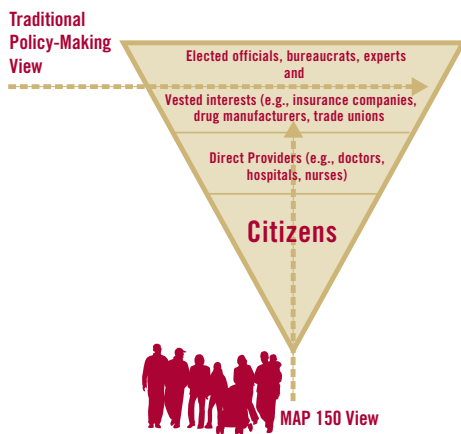
by Stacy Becker

The premise of the Citizens League's Minnesota Anniversary Project (MAP 150) is that public policy would look really different if policy-making was more connected to people's lives.

My favorite example of this occurred a few months ago during a Medicare Part D conference I attended. The luncheon speaker was quite eloquent in describing all of the hurdles and challenges that were overcome to sign up tens of thousands of seniors for coverage by the deadline. Clearly, congratulations were in order. When the speech ended, the first questioner stood. "I'm a senior citizen," he said. "If I didn't have diabetes before your speech, I think I have it now. Quite simply, I should be able to take my Medicare card into any pharmacy and have my prescription filled. End of story." After a brief stunned silence, applause broke out.

The conference discussion was completely removed from this gentleman's concern. Instead, it was all about "tweaking" the laws to enroll more people, and other ideas for fine tuning that are incomprehensible to most users.

One speaker offered an eye-opening moment though. Former U.S. Senator Dave Durenberger described policy making as an inverted pyramid that looks like this (sorry, I have crudely adopted his basic point here).



Depending on whether you are looking "up" through the system as a citizen or "across" the top of the system as a policy-maker, you'll experience the system (whatever it might be—education, transportation, health care) quite differently.

So some questions for MAP 150 are: How do we bring this citizen perspective more fully into policy-making? Is there common ground among citizens? Are citizens interested? Do they want their voices heard? Are they ready for the responsibility and accountability that comes with having a more active role in policy outcomes?

### Citizens speak their minds

Over the summer, four journalists hit the road on behalf of MAP 150, traveling throughout Minnesota to ask citizens just these questions: What issues do they care about? Where do they think responsibility for change lies? Briefly, here's what they heard.

- People want to be heard! One of the most important findings is that most people are excited to be heard, and very thankful that someone is asking their opinion. They'd like to get more involved, but don't know how or they think that no one will listen.
- Desire for stronger Minnesota. People express the desire for a more representative Minnesota, one not based on rules for the rich and/or powerful.
- More transparency with tax money. People want to know how their tax money is being spent, and whether it is well spent. Some don't like the use of their tax money to support the status quo in politics or for splashy items like stadiums.
- Dissatisfaction with current state of politics. The most commonly held opinion is that the current political system is not working—it's too divisive, unproductive, and unconnected to the community. Leadership is lacking.
- Education is top priority. Well, other polls have told us this. But the interesting thing is that when people talk about education, they're looking at it as a long-term investment the state needs to make.
- Health care as an ethical issue. People see access to affordable health care as an ethical issue. They also think the government has a strong role in eradicating disease.
- Insecurity about the future. In wealthy communities this wasn't a factor, but throughout the state people expressed real concern about being able to provide for their families' needs, both financially

"We should be more willing to voice our opinion on everything...because anything that government turns into law...affects us. Something develops in us that makes us feel as though we're not capable of getting them to see things our way."



— Latice Robinson, Morris

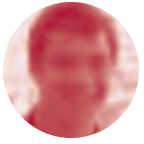
"If we are concerned only about our one particular issue, then we may have trouble finding common ground because other people are opposed to us. But if we realize a broad range of things—even if we disagree on one or two issues—there are bound to be dozens of others where we can get a consensus."



— Bob Kraftson, Hastings

- (both parents must work), and given financial pressures, the necessary time commitment to ensure the well-being of their kids.
- Community viability. In growing communities people are acutely aware that their communities are changing, and not always for the better. In some rural communities, people wonder whether their community can survive.
- Civic responsibility. Most people think about what government can do better. But when asked about personal responsibility, they pause, become quite thoughtful, and agree that, yes, they do have responsibilities as citizens.
- Question about common ground. Some people questioned whether it's possible when the system picks winners and losers, dividing people from the get-go on an issue. Others think it's more than possible; it's our responsibility as citizens.

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## Our summer in policyland

Two Citizens League interns share their thoughts and observations on what it takes to foster intergenerational conversation

by Brian Bell and Sarah Powell

During our internships at the Citizens League, we both spent a lot of time thinking about how to better engage our peers in conversations about politics, civic engagement, and the future of Minnesota.

The people who volunteer with the Citizens League, serve on its committees, and come to its events (with the exception of Policy and a Pint) tend to be middle-aged and older. The generation that will support the baby boomers through retirement, grapple with integrating rising numbers of foreign-born immigrants into Minnesota, and cope with climate change is not participating in conversations about these complex issues.

ties, did not prevent the adults of today from developing sound public policies. Quite the contrary; although these forms of participation were unconventional, once refined they have become more prevalent and have helped mold public policy of the last 40 years.

How has this misunderstanding come about? In our experience, it is because youth tend to talk about politics mainly with each other, in somewhat exclusive environments—in coffee shops, dorms, and online.

### It's not "just like the old days"

Intergenerational communication is lacking, which leads to misunderstandings. On top of this, youth today gather information

harnessed into a civic engagement tool. First, however, youth must become better informed.

### Broaden the information base

Young adults need to make the choice to get news from more than just soft news outlets like theonion.com (an online satirical newspaper) and the "The Daily Show," which have made us more pessimistic. The internet has an abundance of information. Because that information is often so polarized, it is the responsibility of the user to avoid confirmation bias, the phenomenon that individuals seek out information favorable to their own opinions. When looking for unbiased facts it is not enough to avoid sources that editorialize, bias is inherent in what news outlets choose to cover. Information consumers must also take the time to look at media on both sides of an issue and come to their own conclusions.

However, older generations need to change too: they must accept that the internet is not something youth need to be drawn away from. Like the television, internet is here to stay and will affect our generation the way the TV did yours. We plug into our computer like generations before sat in front of the radio and listened to news bulletins. Adults also need to be willing to become students again, and to take time to allow their children and students to become their teachers.

How might this medium work? It is not sufficient to simply have online tools that offer civic engagement. As Jack Ulrich mentioned in *The Future of the Web and Civic Engagement*, for a "crowd" to be relevant it must be informed, deliberative, community based, and diverse.

### Create youth friendly forums

Although very important, the above characteristics are only part of the picture if the internet is going to foster intergenerational civic engagement. Forums need to be friendly to both youth and adults, like the Policy and a Pint forum. Events need to be professional but not snooty; conveniently located near the University of Minnesota and downtown Minneapolis; affordable; and most important, interactive. Although blogs often allow viewers to post comments,



Baby-boomers and the members of the "Greatest Generation" might account for this lack of youth voice by declaring that young adults are apathetic, more interested in \$5 Starbucks lattes and the newest iPod than in politics or civic engagement. We find this to be a generalization. Like generations before us, we feel cynical about government and the political process, and we're frustrated by the sense that no one is listening to us. But to describe our "iPod generation" as ignorant and disinterested miscasts us.

Moreover, these symbols of our generation are not mutually exclusive of political engagement, just as baby boomers favorite "pastimes," music festivals and occupying the administration buildings of major universi-

ties, did not prevent the adults of today from developing sound public policies. Rather than picking up newspapers, we gather facts by sifting through online sources like blogs and online magazines, both of which, as Jen Alstad pointed out during the Citizens League event *The Future of the Web and Civic Engagement*, tend to polarize issues, a reality that only exacerbates our cynicism. This does not have to be the case. There is a theory in philosophy that argues no object is inherently good or bad, rather value is dependent on the extent to which a tool is used for positive or negative ends.

For the internet to realize its potential as a tool for civic engagement, youth need to have their preferred medium of commu-

## Policyland

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there is limited dialogue between respondents. Also the “discussion” creates sense of hierarchy (blogger over blog commenter) that is not conducive to intergenerational discussion.

Finally, this forum must be personal without compromising professionalism. Politics up until now has been based largely on, well, just that, politics, and requires knowing on a personal and intellectual level those involved in the deliberating process. This is why it would be helpful to not only know another's political leanings

(a feature MySpace includes) but also other information as simple as your favorite 20th century politician.

Skeptics who discount social networking forums such as MySpace and Facebook as places where social change can take place do not see the technology's potential. We would like to remind them that initially the PC was used for little more than word processing. Over time it developed into a tool to break down “place” barriers between economies. In a similar fashion, the internet has great potential to become

a tool not only for youth civic engagement, but a tool for political discussion between generations and geographies. ●

Brian Bell, 21, and Sarah Powell, 20, worked as Citizens League interns this summer. Bell is a senior at the University of Minnesota and continues at the Citizens League as a part-time office manager; Powell is a junior at Emory University and is spending fall semester studying and working in New York City.

## Road map

continued from page 7

### Next step: a poll of Minnesotans

As representative as our journalists tried to be with their selection of interview subjects, there is no way that the voices of roughly 200 people can speak with any authority for all Minnesotans. So the next step is to take the journalists' findings and test them in a scientific poll.

The concept underlying the poll is that the media have it wrong. Tired of hearing from pundits about how stupid and apathetic people are? Our journalists found people to be engaging, thoughtful, full of concern for others, and willing to take personal responsibility for outcomes that benefit our communities as a whole. (Video clips from these interviews—and the opportunity for you to add your voice—will be coming soon to the MAP 150 website.) The Citizens League will construct a statewide poll that tests, in effect, the Citizens League principles: belief in the power and potential of citizens, democracy and good governance, and active citizenship.

Active citizenship may have a different meaning today than it did when the Citizen League was founded in 1952 because of changes in the work force, technology, and political processes. The purpose of MAP 150 is to rejuvenate and reinforce citizenship now. Citizens clearly sense that many things are not quite “right” and they want changes. Through our poll, MAP 150 will

“I just think that politics...[and] politicians have gotten to be very self serving. And it's not really for the people anymore. We need to get back to grassroots, and listening, and cooperating, and being for the people.”



— Cynthia Carney,  
Burnsville

try to discover what issues citizens might be willing to dig in and roll their sleeves up on together.

### How you can get involved

In November, the results of the poll, the interviews, and related facts assembled by fellow Citizen League members will help formulate a three to five point “agenda” for Minnesota. This agenda will offer a definite point of view. For example, it's not enough to say that education matters. Rather, we hope to identify what citizens want and are willing to work for in education.

As the state's premier citizens' voice, we are hoping that Citizen League members will help shape this agenda. Here are some upcoming opportunities:

- Participate in the poll online. It's your opportunity as a Citizens League member to weigh in on the MAP 150 agenda. Also, as the citizen leadership in Minnesota, it will be helpful to see how members' views compare with those of the larger public.
- Provide commentary on a few select poll questions. Selected comments will be printed in a special MAP 150 edition of the November *Minnesota Journal* and will be featured on the website.
- Contribute to the fact-gathering process by identifying important sources you know.
- Comment on the citizen voices or blogs.

To help set the agenda for Minnesota's future and to participate in the MAP 150 survey, go to [www.map150.org](http://www.map150.org). ●

Stacy Becker is a member of the Citizens League and the MAP 150 Project Director.

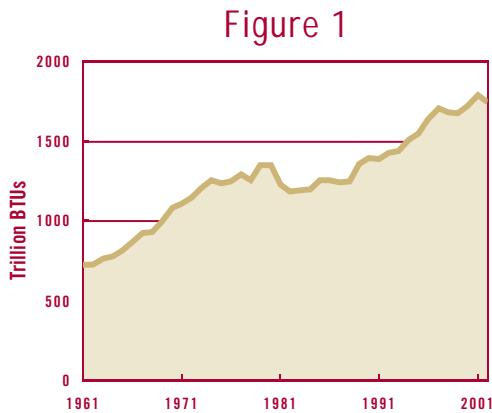
It's that time of year...  
check out the list of  
nominees for the Citizens  
League Board of Directors  
on our website:  
[www.citizensleague.net](http://www.citizensleague.net)

# FACTS UNFILTERED

Minnesota's energy past, present, and future

Q. What is the trend in energy use in Minnesota?

A. Upward! Figure 1 shows total energy use in Minnesota in BTUs (British Thermal Units). Total energy use has increased by 140 percent since 1960. There are two reasons for this growth: a 44 percent increase in population and a 71 percent increase in per capita energy use.

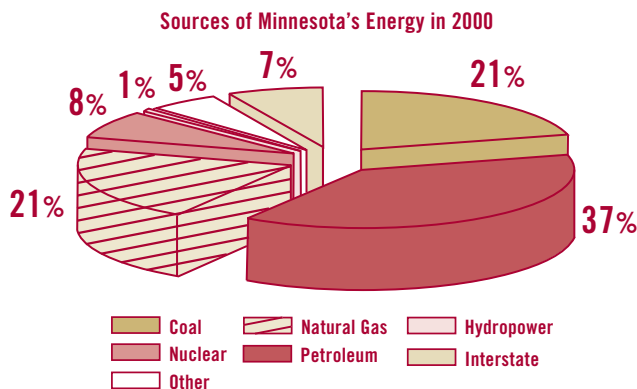


Q. Why has per capita energy use increased?

A. The potential for energy savings from technology innovation has been largely offset by increased consumption. For example, since 1980 the average fuel economy for passenger cars increased from 16 to 22 miles per gallon; mileage for SUVs and light trucks increased from 12 to 17 mpg over the same period. However, from 1980 to 2000 the number of vehicle miles traveled per person increased from 7,000 to 10,800, a 53 percent increase. Also, the percentage of people driving SUVs and light trucks instead of passenger cars increased. Similarly, airline travel has more than doubled, from 970 miles per person in 1980 to nearly 2,000 miles per person in 2000. And the average square footage of a new house has grown by 57 percent since 1970.

We drive more, fly more, and consume more than we used to. The consequence: despite technological advances in energy efficiency, we use slightly more energy per person now than we did in 1970.

Figure 2



Q. Where do we get our energy?

A. Figure 2 shows that nearly 80 percent of Minnesota's energy in 2000 came from fossil fuels burned within the state. Other sources included imported electricity (7%) and nuclear generation (8%). "Other" sources (5%) included wind, solar and alternative fuels.

Q. What are the trends for renewable energy in Minnesota?

A. Minnesota's ethanol production capacity has increased 15 fold in the past decade, but still comprises only about 3 percent of Minnesota's total energy needs. According to the National Corn Growers Association, corn-based ethanol could replace about 10 percent of our national gasoline need, with no change in the amount of corn used for animal feed. This projection reflects increasing corn yields per acre, increasing acreage planted in corn, and improved efficiency in the conversion of corn starch to ethanol.

Corn-based ethanol production is strongly influenced by the federal corn subsidy, plus a direct ethanol subsidy (51 cents/gallon). Some other factors affecting growth in corn-based ethanol production include the quantity of water needed to produce ethanol (about five gallons of water for every gallon of ethanol) and technological advances in the area of cellulose-based ethanol production.

Wind is also a growing source of alternative energy. In 2005, there were 683 turbines in Minnesota producing 600 megawatts of electricity, about 1 percent of Minnesota's total energy supply. One of the key issues limiting wind power is the development of transmission infrastructure.

Q. How could conservation reduce Minnesota's energy use?

A. Based on an examination of energy consumption patterns, it appears that new technologies alone will not reduce energy consumption because gains in efficiency are offset by increased consumption. This suggests that, if our goal is to reduce energy consumption, conservation measures may need to be encouraged by regulatory measures such as higher gas taxes, tighter gasoline mileage standards for cars and trucks, the development of mass transit, updated building codes, and other means.

Energy conservation has numerous advantages compared to increasing the supply of energy. First, energy conservation can save consumers money. U.S. expenditures on all types of energy now average \$2,400 per person, or \$6,240 per household. On a national level, we import nearly \$100 billion of petroleum, which accounts for one-quarter of our trade deficit. Energy conservation also translates directly into reduced carbon dioxide emissions. Finally, energy conservation offers the side benefit of reducing urban air pollution, which would improve respiratory health, particularly for individuals with existing respiratory problems.

Check out these links for more information

The Energy Information Administration has many downloadable energy tables, [www.eia.doe.gov](http://www.eia.doe.gov)

The Minnesota Ethanol Program, [www.mda.state.mn.us/ethanol/about.htm](http://www.mda.state.mn.us/ethanol/about.htm).

National Corn Growers Association fact sheet, "How much energy can come from corn?" [www.mncorn.org/mcga/ethanol/how\\_much\\_ethanol\\_can\\_come\\_from\\_corn.pdf](http://www.mncorn.org/mcga/ethanol/how_much_ethanol_can_come_from_corn.pdf)

Minnesota's Wind Power Industry fact sheet, [www.deed.state.mn.us/facts/PDFs/windenergy.pdf](http://www.deed.state.mn.us/facts/PDFs/windenergy.pdf).

Air quality in Minnesota, progress and priorities, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, [www.pca.state.mn.us/publications/reports/lr-airqualityreport-2005.html](http://www.pca.state.mn.us/publications/reports/lr-airqualityreport-2005.html).

Minnesota Department of Administration, Milestones that matter: vehicle miles traveled per person, [www.mnplan.state.mn.us/mm/indicator.html?id=57&G=39](http://www.mnplan.state.mn.us/mm/indicator.html?id=57&G=39).

American Homebuilders Association, Housing facts, figures and trends, [www.nahb.org/publication\\_details.aspx?publicationID=2028](http://www.nahb.org/publication_details.aspx?publicationID=2028).

# PERSPECTIVES

Expanding Minnesota's Conversation



## A new take on the old town hall forum

The UBS Forum at Minnesota Public Radio engages new audiences

by Jeff Nelson

Is Minnesota Public Radio keeping up with the times? In an era of broadband, blogs, instant messaging, RSS feeds, video conferencing and Web streaming, broadcasters are always trying to reach a larger audience more effectively. MPR's newest service, The Current, has fans who e-mail from 8,000 miles away in New Zealand to request songs. Given the technological revolutions that continue to expand our global reach, why would MPR invest in a studio space in its newly expanded headquarters that best serves an audience of 120 people?

In many ways, MPR is leading a revolution of its own. In the 1930s and '40s, many radio programs were simply extensions of the town hall meetings and vaudeville shows of the pre-broadcast era. Suddenly a city council meeting with 20 people in attendance could be broadcast to an audience of thousands. This meant a new level of accountability for the government and the sudden (and unfortunate) emergence of the sound bite.

Soon the broadcast became more important than the live meeting or performance itself. Vaudeville shows were replaced by radio plays and eventually sitcoms. In the '50s, television unseated radio as America's dominant source for news and entertainment. Town hall meetings sometimes turned into Crossfire. Broadcasting, once an opportunity to enlarge the town hall, was instead moved into private studios, where paid pundits lob platitudes at each other far away from the public sphere.

MPR has always fought this trend. Radio long ago pioneered the call-in show, a uniquely democratic broadcast where anyone can call in with a question or comment. For four hours each weekday, MPR takes callers from all over the region on topics ranging from war to pop culture. Anyone who has sat in the studio during a live broadcast of Midday or Midmorning at MPR knows that it is a risky venture. When

The more sources you have for a story, the more voices represented on the air, the better and more comprehensive the coverage. It all revolves around the idea of audience engagement.

the public is invited to weigh in, who knows what might happen? More often than not, what happens is a new and important voice is added to the broadcast: yours.

MPR has taken this concept a step further with its Public Insight Journalism initiative. For centuries a journalist's ability to cover a story was limited by his or her personal network. If someone is writing a story about a flood, they would ask their friends and colleagues if they knew anyone affected by the flood. Now MPR has developed a nationwide database of 20,000 vetted sources so our newsroom can ask thousands of people if they are affected by the flood. The more sources you have for a story, the more voices represented on the air, the better and more comprehensive the coverage. It all revolves around the idea of audience engagement. When we engage our audience in the creation of our content, everyone benefits. MPR finds better and more diverse sources for news stories, our audience gets involved in the media they rely upon and the result is a deeper story.

Inspired by the success of Public Insight Journalism, MPR made another commitment to audience engagement. In many ways, The UBS Forum at Minnesota Public

Radio is a new take on the old town hall forum. It is a 120-seat studio where radio and all other forms of broadcasting come together with an audience of engaged citizens to talk about our community's most pressing public issues. It is a room where the police chiefs of Minneapolis and Saint Paul can sit down with 60 citizens and talk about why crime is increasing in their neighborhoods and what to do about it, while 150,000 people listen and perhaps call in to participate in the conversation.

In The UBS Forum's first eight months we've hosted discussions on topics ranging from immigration to healthcare. We asked Newt Gingrich, Vin Weber and a roomful of college students to talk about the future of the conservative movement. We locked the city staffs of Minneapolis and Saint Paul in a room for six hours so they could hash out real opportunities for collaboration between the two cities. Mayors, farmers, members of Congress, new immigrants, bloggers, artists, concerned citizens, legislators, national journalists and community leaders have used the space to air their concerns and to gain insight around issues that matter. Some of the conversations have been extremely technical; many more have been electrifying. All have been important.

Now, thanks to the generous sponsorship of UBS, our forum has a new name and the funding needed to dig deep into the issues facing the future of Minnesota. On occasion we have referred to the UBS Forum as a "public studio." It is a unique place where the microphones are on and the voices broadcasted are yours. What do you care about? We want to hear from you. ●

Jeff Nelson is the Senior Producer of The UBS Forum.

# 10/18

## 22nd Annual Conference on Policy Analysis

Gain insight into current trends in the policy-making world, explore current policy issues and share ideas with policy analysts and policy-makers from around Minnesota.

Continuing Education and Conference Center, St. Paul. 7:30 a.m. - 4:15 p.m.

Register online at [www.cce.umn.edu/policyanalysis](http://www.cce.umn.edu/policyanalysis).

# 10/23

## Citizens League Annual Meeting

Join friends and neighbors from down the street and across the aisle at the Citizens League Annual Meeting. Following a brief (we promise!) business meeting, we'll share key findings from the Minnesota Anniversary Project (MAP 150) polling done this fall. We'll ask you to weigh in on what we need to do to make Minnesota stronger for all Minnesotans.

Milwaukee Depot, reception 5:30 p.m., program 6:30 p.m. and dessert at 7:30 p.m.

The annual meeting is free and open to everyone. RSVP online at [www.citizensleague.net/events/upcoming](http://www.citizensleague.net/events/upcoming) or call 651-293-0575 ext. 16.

PERIODICALS



555 North Wabasha Street, Suite 240  
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