

## Filed your state tax return early? Check for errors



**ROBERT  
WHEREATT**

Some Minnesota taxpayers, planning to get a jump on those irksome taxes, filed early, and they may have inadvertently filed with an error that benefits them if undetected. The state, though, is on the trail and hopes to catch the errors.

These are not slam-the-jail-door errors, mind you. It just that the Legislature changed a few of the tax rules late in the game, setting up some of those early filers for possible errors, specifically teachers and those who claim tuition deductions on their federal tax returns.

In the past, teachers could claim deductions on federal and state returns of up to \$250 for classroom materials they bought with their own money. As many as 60,000 teacher-filers were eligible, according to Carol Wald, the

Minnesota Revenue Department's assistant commissioner for income taxes. Taxpayers also could claim as much as \$4,000 for college tuition and fees on federal and state returns. About 100,000 Minnesota filers take that deduction, according to Wald.

Those two deductions are worth about \$20 million annually for taxpayers or for the state, depending on the direction from which you view it. The state generally has conformed to the federal return since 1987, keying off the federal taxable income figure, a widely applauded effort to simplify the filing exercise. "I think we improved the system when we did that," said Dan Salomone, deputy commissioner of the Minnesota Revenue Department.

But when the feds change the tax rules, which it does almost annually, the Legislature has to decide if it will follow suit. (The Revenue Department explains the changes on its website.) When budget times for the state

are flush, it normally does. In recent years, Congress has been increasing tax breaks.

The state is required to balance its budget and has to measure the revenue impact of following the tax footsteps of the federal government. "It's rarely a windfall for the state," said Salomone. "Generally, in recent years, the federal government has been reducing its tax base, and so we've been put in a box year after year of conforming and taking a revenue hit, or not conforming and having, in some cases, a significantly more complicated tax calculation."

### Lawmakers decide against deductions

Facing a projected budget deficit, the Legislature on March 7 decided against the tuition deduction and the education expense deduction. That means those taxpayers still can claim the deductions on their federal returns, but not on their state returns. They are

required to add back that deduction on the state form. Despite written instructions, some early filers, perhaps recalling their previous filing pattern, may not have added the deductions back, said Wald. They may have to amend their returns.

How many? "We're hoping not very many," said Wald. Revenue Department workers with the help of their computers are checking returns and can adjust mistakes for those two items, she said. Computer software vendors have been notified of the changes and adjusted their programs, said Wald. Tax practitioners, too, have been notified.

John McCarthy, a certified public accountant who practices in Roseville, said the late change "complicates it a little bit." Professionals will be up to date, said McCarthy. "The ones I really care about are the ones who do their own returns... It could affect the refund you get back or you pay in more."

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## MINNPOST.WORLD

## Foreclosure relief: Bailout or boon for bad behavior?

By STEVE BERG

One good bailout deserves another. Or does it?

The Federal Reserve's extraordinary rescue of the foundering Wall Street investment bank Bear Stearns inspired the Senate this week to move toward passing legislation aimed at helping the opposite end of the housing debacle: homeowners facing foreclosure and a housing industry hoping to regain some measure of traction.

But the bill, which could pass the Senate as early as next week, was broadly criticized as not living up to its name. The "Foreclosure Prevention Act" would put some small change in the pockets of ordinary people. But most of the benefit would flow in tax breaks to some of the same companies that caused the problem in the first place.

"Those who stand to benefit most are homebuilders and businesses hit by the economic downturn," the Washington Post reported. "Through 2010, the entire tax package would cost about \$28.8 billion, of which \$25.5 billion would go to money-losing businesses in the form of tax rebates." (Those businesses would give up other tax breaks to reduce the cost of the entire bill to \$15 billion by 2018.)

"Anybody who gets money in their hands out of this bill will be happy, but that does not mean it will solve the larger social problem or larger economic problem," said Peter Morici, a University of Maryland economics professor quoted by the Post.

Indeed, the bill offers a relatively modest menu considering the scope of the problem. A new property tax deduction of \$1,000 for couples and \$500 for individuals would help tax filers who do not itemize deductions. Tax-exempt bonds worth \$10 billion would go to local housing agencies to refinance subprime loans and provide new first-time mortgages. Grants worth \$4 billion would be offered to local governments for buying foreclosed properties. And \$100

million would expand counseling for homeowners at risk of defaulting on their loans.

The bill also gives a tax credit to anyone who buys a foreclosed home. And it provides the aforementioned tax breaks for builders and their lending partners, allowing them to write off current losses on taxes paid in previous, more profitable years.

Stricken from the bill was a provision favored by many Democrats allowing bankruptcy judges to ease mortgage payment terms for distressed borrowers.

Altogether, the package would cost taxpayers an estimated \$15 billion. By contrast, the cost of taking on the bad housing debt accumulated by Bear Stearns carried a cost of \$29 billion.

Senate Banking Committee Chairman Christopher Dodd, D-Conn., and Sen. Richard Shelby, R-Ala., the ranking Republican, emphasized that this effort is a modest first step in trying to boost Main Street business and help ordinary Americans. Indeed, the fact that Republicans seemed eager for government to intervene in the economy and to emphasize the bipartisan nature of the effort was taken by many as an indication of the situation's severity.

**Revisions expected**

Still, the bill was heavily criticized, and House leaders vowed to make major changes.

A Washington Post editorial called portions of the bill an "awful idea."

Who would benefit most? "A good guess is the folks who made money hand over fist during the housing bubble but have been losing money at the same rate since the subprime mortgage market collapsed last year: the home construction industry and Wall Street firms such as Merrill Lynch and Citigroup. In other words, this provision is a large, unwarranted bailout for the very industries that helped send the U.S. economy on its scary roller-coaster ride in the first place."

Aaron Katsman of Blogging-

stocks.com complained about the local government provision.

"So the Senate decided that local governments should get \$4 billion to get into the real estate 'flipping' market."

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi also criticized the tax breaks for builders and the enticements for speculators to buy up low-cost houses with government help. "Hopefully the balance will swing to be more in favor of those families who are in danger of losing their homes," she said.

The House expects to launch a more aggressive approach next week. Rep. Barney Frank, chairman of the Financial Services Committee, will open hearings on a bill to provide \$300 billion in federally guaranteed loans to help refinance the mortgages of as many as 1.5 million homeowners at risk of default.

Frank's proposal, according to the New York Times, would require lenders to take losses by cutting the principle balance on troubled loans. The hope is to avoid further foreclosures on a massive scale.

**More rewards for bad behavior?**

The problem with all of this intervention – whether it's government help for lenders, builders or at-risk homeowners -- is that it seems to reward the very behavior that caused the problem. Somehow the lesson seems lost on smug investment bankers, greedy lenders, free-wheeling builders, speculators and people who shouldn't have qualified as homebuyers.

At the same time, these bailouts are a slap in the face to those who have been diligent stewards. Their taxes will now pay for the foolishness of others, says Washington Post columnist Robert Samuelson, who worries that the various aid packages offer a cure worse than the disease.

People who made large down payments or kept their monthly payments at manageable levels would be made relatively worse off, he wrote. Government in this case "punishes prudence and re-

wards irresponsibility."

Helping the irresponsible was also a theme at a Senate Banking Committee session with Federal Reserve officials on Thursday. Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke and others were hauled into explain why and how the Fed arranged to take over Bear Stearns' real estate portfolio at taxpayers' expense while dumping the rest of the troubled company into the arms of JPMorgan Chase.

It was not a bailout of Wall Street, they insisted, but a desperate act to shield the overall economy from a destructive financial implosion that would have left virtually no one untouched. That was their answer as described by Toronto's Globe and Mail.

"The benefit of our action is not Bear Stearns, or even Wall Street. It's Main Street," Bernanke said.

New York's Federal Reserve President Timothy Geithner, who brokered the deal, was more explicit. A collapse would have meant "lower incomes for working families, higher borrowing costs for housing, education and the expenses of everyday life, lower value of retirement savings and rising unemployment."

Also disclosed Thursday was the extent to which the Fed has been lending money to Wall Street investment firms under a new program.

The borrowing averaged \$38.1 billion last week and \$32.9 billion the week before, compared to \$13.4 billion in the first week that the Fed opened its credit window to investment firms.

The program began on March 17 as part of the Fed's effort to help the financial system. The big Wall Street firms will be allowed to get emergency loans directly from the central bank over the next six months. The practice is patterned after a similar service available to commercial banks. It is the broadest use of the Fed's lending authority since the 1930s.

Steve Berg can be reached at [sberg@minnpost.com](mailto:sberg@minnpost.com).

## KBEM radio launches Reel Jazz film series

### PAMELA ESPELAND

How many jazz films can you name? If I think hard, I can manage a half-dozen:

- “Bird” (about Charlie Parker)
- “Round Midnight” (starring Dexter Gordon)
- Bruce Weber’s grim “Let’s Get Lost” (about Chet Baker)
- Robert Altman’s “Kansas City”
- “Paris Blues” (with Paul Newman and Sidney Poitier)
- “My Name is Albert Ayler”

The Ayler film was part of Sound Unseen in 2006, the only jazz film in the festival.

Many more films about jazz have been made, but they seldom show in theaters, and good luck finding them at Blockbuster.

Kevin Barnes of KBEM, the jazz and education radio station that broadcasts from North High School, wants to change this. Starting small, dreaming big, he’s launching the Jazz88 Reel Jazz Film Series.

Barnes hosts the radio shows “String Theory,” which airs on Sundays from 9 p.m. to 11 p.m., and “Bluesville,” heard on Fridays during the same time slot. His official title at KBEM is underwriting assistant. But he’s really the station’s resident bon vivant and party planner.

Barnes is the brains behind the monthly Gallery Grooves (co-sponsored by the Rake, continuing despite the Rake’s print demise), where lovers of art and jazz convene at a local gallery to view artwork, sample wines, enjoy hors d’oeuvres, and hear recent jazz releases.

He invented the Restaura-

tion, a fundraiser held each month at a different locally owned restaurant. (This month: Lucia’s.) For a while, he put together Jazz Cooks classes with local chefs and an occasional food-and-theater evening he called Prospero’s Kitchen.

None of these events is a big moneymaker. All build the KBEM brand and promote a sense of community among the station’s listeners and members. “They give people a chance to connect,” Barnes says.

### More than a screening

In signature Barnes style, each Reel Jazz event will be more than just a screening. Held at the intimate Bryant Lake Bowl Cabaret Theater, it will begin with a 30-minute live music set by a high school jazz quartet and end with a discussion, either in the theater or the BLB bar.

The series begins on Thursday, April 10, with the Twin Cities premiere of “ ‘Tis Autumn: The Search for Jackie Paris” (2006), a film by Oscar-nominated director Raymond De Felitta, who first heard the singer on the radio in 1991 and was blown away.

Paris’s story sounds like a jazz cliché: meteoric rise in the 1950s, a fall into obscurity in the 1960s, dead in 1977 at age 51. Except he wasn’t dead.

One night in March 2004, De Felitta was scanning the club listings in the “New Yorker” when he saw that Paris was scheduled to perform at the Jazz Standard in Manhattan. He flew out, saw the show and introduced himself.

Filming began a few days later. Paris would live another three months before dying of

### “ ‘Tis Autumn: The Search for Jackie Paris”

- Bryant Lake Bowl Cabaret Theater, 810 W. Lake St., Minneapolis
- Thursday, April 10. Doors open at 6 p.m. Preston Haining Quartet plays at 6:30 p.m. Film begins at 7 p.m.
- \$10. Seating limited to 80. To reserve your tickets, email Kevin Barnes at KevinB@Jazz88fm.com or call 612-668-1735.

bone cancer.

The film includes performance footage, previously unreleased recordings, and interviews with George Wein, founder of the Newport Jazz Festival; Phil Schaap, New York radio DJ and historian (you may have seen him on stage at Orchestra Hall introducing a jazz performance); and jazz greats Mark Murphy, James Moody and Dr. Billy Taylor.

“It’s a beautiful film,” Barnes says. “So personal. It’s really about the life of an artist — the challenges, the ups and downs. What is success about? What is life about? You learn about a great jazz singer, but also about life, art, history and timing. And how you handle your regrets.”

“Variety” called the film “magnificent and moving.” The 2006 Kansas City Filmmakers Jubilee named it Best Jazz Documentary, and it was an official selection at Sundance in 2006.

Come early and hear live jazz by the Preston Haining Quartet. Haining, an Edina High School student, has jazz genes; his father, Doug Haining, leads the Twin Cities Seven. Stay after and you just might hear Leigh Kamman, former host of Minnesota Public Radio’s “The Jazz Image,” talk

about his interview with Paris in the 1950s. Barnes can’t promise Kamman will show up, only that he’s been invited.

Barnes has scheduled two more films for this spring. “New Orleans Music in Exile” (2006), directed by Robert Mugge, tells the personal stories of musicians affected by Hurricane Katrina including Irma Thomas, Kermit Ruffins and Dr. John. It shows at the BLB on Thursday, May 9. The North High Jazz Ensemble will perform.

June 12 is another Twin Cities premiere: Ron Mann’s “Imagine the Sound” (1981). Many critics consider this one of the all-time great jazz films. Newly restored and presented in HD, it profiles four leaders of the jazz avant-garde in the 1960s: Cecil Taylor, Archie Shepp, Bill Dixon and Paul Bley.

Barnes will give the series the summer off, then start it up again with three more films in October, November and December. From there, who knows? “I’m hoping we can look at a point in the future where we have a true jazz film festival,” he says. “I’ve thought about the festival idea for a long time.”

## MinnPost in Print

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that contributes to the health of our democracy and the quality of our lives. Please consider making a donation to MinnPost, a nonprofit enterprise.

Joel Kramer, CEO and editor

# Guitar man Daithi Sproule trots globe to beat the band

MICHAEL METZGER

If you think your commute to and from work is a long one, think of the distance guitarist Dáithí Sproule travels to get together with Altan, the traditional Irish band he has played with for more than 20 years. Sproule lives in West St. Paul, and his band mates make their homes in Ireland.

Luckily, he only makes the 3,800-mile commute four or five times a year: when he begins tours of Europe and elsewhere or when he records with Altan.

"We've been playing together for more than 20 years now, so there isn't much need of rehearsal," he says. "If there's new material, you just have a tape of it and you get up and play it."

They do exchange MP3s of new songs. "Often, years ago, people used to play tunes to each other over the phone," he says with a laugh. "And you would have your little tape recorder to the phone, and you'd be trying to rehearse the thing later at very low volume and with all this distortion."

Sproule spent Christmas and New Year's in Ireland for

business and pleasure. He spent holiday time with his mother in Derry, then at an Altan festival in Donegal, where he taught guitar and performed.

"After that, I went straight off to Holland and did a tour of Holland with Altan, and then I came back and then I went off for a month's U.S. tour with Altan and then I came back from that, and then I was in Moscow a week ago with [Irish accordionist] Paddy O'Brien. So it's been a hectic year so far. It's not always that busy, but yeah, my head was spinning."

Sproule says he's going to be in Minnesota for about a month, during which there will be a party celebrating the release of his new solo CD, "The Crow in the Sun," at 8 p.m. today (April 4) at the Cedar Cultural Center, 416 Cedar Ave. S., Minneapolis.

He says the songs, like his solo CDs (this is his second one), come slowly; one or two per year. Nevertheless, the backlog of unrecorded material built up during the decades.

"For years and years, I've just had this idea that I should record a batch of them, so that's what

I've done."

He says two tunes on the disc, "Angela's Jig" and "Lady from York," date to 1970 or so.

That's when he was a university student in Dublin playing with the group Skara Brae. He soon began playing the clubs and doing session work there, before finding his way to Minneapolis in 1978.

That's where he met his first wife and decided to settle down, happy in a place where there's a lively Irish community and music scene.

## Stories in strings

He says "Crow in the Sun" is an autobiographical journey for him. But it's one without words; the story is instead told in exquisitely wrought melodies plucked out precisely and passionately on his acoustic guitar.

"The first few years you're playing an instrument, you're trying to find a style and you're more influenced by people. So the oldest tunes were influenced by some of the great English guitarists, Bert Jansch and John Renbourn, who used to play with Pentangle.

So those kinds of songs were very much in my head.

"After a couple of years, any serious musician has to find a style or their own feel."

The CD is an autobiographical trip for Sproule, but his life's journey is one of playing traditional Irish music in front of crowds around the world. So what's a traditional musician doing playing new music?

"Any traditional musician ... has their ears open and you're listening to more than one sort of music. ... what has happened to me is that traditional music, which I really love, is a part of my life and it's something that was around me from the beginning, and it has dominated what I've performed as a public performer ... but at the same time, every musician I know has other music in their head.

"Also in your head, you have other sounds and other feelings that can maybe only be expressed in some other way and that would be true of these tunes. They're not really Irish, they're not American, they're not anything — they're just me."

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1. Dorothy Hatsukami, Joni Jensen, Stephen Hecht, Sharon Murphy. Carcinogen and nicotine exposure in hospitality workers before and after the state comprehensive smoking ban. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, March 2008. URL: [www.tturc.umn.edu](http://www.tturc.umn.edu)

## Bye-bye, bonding bill? Lawmakers wait – and wonder what Pawlenty will do

By G.R. ANDERSON JR.

At the tail end of a three-hour debate over the bonding bill on the House floor Wednesday, the DFL's chief sponsor of the bill, Rep. Alice Hausman of St. Paul, sounded a weary note.

"I was a unicameral supporter back in the days when we had a tiny little bit of a debate about that," Hausman noted of a long-ago notion floated by Jesse Ventura. "In part it was because of the messiness of this process. It's probably not one you would invent for efficient decision making."

Boy, she could say that again. Nearly a month after the House and the Senate each passed their versions of an "Omnibus Capital Investment bill," (PDF) the two sides finally came together and passed a version that had been gestating for weeks in conference committee. The back-and-forth between Hausman and the Senate's bill carrier, Keith Langseth, DFL-Glyndon, took on slightly mythical status in some corners of the Capitol, as the days dragged on before the committee even met. Even though the House and Senate versions were only \$5 million apart, consensus even within the same party seemed maddeningly out of reach.

By many accounts, Hausman and the House DFL leadership were somewhat held hostage by Langseth and Democratic Senate leaders. In light of the state's budget forecast earlier this session, which predicted a \$935 million deficit this year, Gov. Tim Pawlenty — acting on the recommendation of the state's economist Tom Stinson — said that he would not sign a bonding bill that was larger than \$825 million. Langseth, it was repeated on both floors, would not come down below \$925 million in general obligation bonds, even though Hausman and many of her DFLer cohorts were willing to go lower.

In the end, the feeling in the air Wednesday was that for all the support the bill received in

both chambers, lawmakers had passed a bill that would never see the light of day.

Pawlenty generally criticized DFL lawmakers today, but even the Republican leadership professes to not know what the governor will do with the bonding bill. Pawlenty has indicated he would veto any bill that did not match his \$825 million figure, but some GOPers are hoping Pawlenty might get out his line-item veto pen, rather than using the rubber stamp that vetoes the whole package.

The bill was sent to Pawlenty this morning, which means he will have until midnight on Monday to make a decision. But if he torpedoed the entire thing, it could very well be that lawmakers will not go back to the drawing board — and after the transportation bill override, there is little will to override the governor again.

In other words, bye-bye, bonding bill.

### A full veto?

"My sense is that there will be a full veto, and in the house the veto will be sustained," David Senjem, the Senate's minority leader, said this morning, adding that the handful of House Republicans who voted for the bill would not vote to override the governor. "My instincts will be then that everybody will say we won't have a bonding bill."

Rep. Ryan Winkler, a House DFLer from Golden Valley, shares Senjem's view. "My prediction is the bill will be vetoed in total, which is what [Pawlenty] did last year," Winkler said today. "A better approach would be the line-item pen."

But many lawmakers, even on the GOP side, fear coming up empty, especially in an election year. House Minority Leader Marty Seifert said during debate Wednesday that he would be willing to talk to Pawlenty about going the line-item route, but only after railing DFL leadership — particularly Langseth — for crafting a bill sure to sink.

Still, it was a conciliatory

gesture of sorts by the normally polarizing Seifert, and it's a sentiment echoed by some of his colleagues. "I'm hoping to talk with Representative Seifert and the governor and recommend some line items," said Rep. Larry Howes, R-Walker.

Howes pointed to two things many in his party take issue with: the \$70 million set aside for the Central Corridor Light Rail and the \$11 million for a gorilla exhibit at the Como Zoo. "There's \$81 million right there," Howes said. The Como dollars were repeatedly derided by Republicans as money for "gorilla cages," and the feeling among Howes, Senjem and others is that the Central Corridor project is not far enough along to be spending money on planning.

"This won't do any jobs," Howes said, twisting the DFL spin on the bonding as a "jobs bill." "This will just hire lawyers and planners and advisers. This won't put a shovel in the ground."

Brutal cuts, to be sure, but something has to give. Even many House Democrats have ambivalent feelings about the bill and, like Winkler, would have preferred to come in at Pawlenty's number. "Absolutely, that's what I thought," Winkler said. "There was a lot more interest in the House in paring it back."

Winkler warns against pulling the money for the Central Corridor and the Southwest Corridor, light rail plans that have already received federal money, but he does think that some transit money in the bill could be "reprioritized."

### 'Touch-and-go governor'

The odd thing is, there's not much difference between the original versions the House and the Senate passed and the final product. If cutting \$40 million out could happen, fiscal conservatives figure, then another \$100 million more could certainly be saved. But at this point, it's as much about politics as spurring jobs and reviving the economy

through local infrastructure projects.

Last week, Sen. Tarryl Clark, the assistant majority leader in the Senate, criticized Pawlenty's role in the bonding bill debate, calling him a "touch-and-go governor. The governor is able to line-item veto without him coming to us and saying, 'Here is my . . . bonding bill,' [which] he did not," Clark said, defending the projects in the bill. "He can take out that big pen he likes so much."

Winkler shares the same feeling, saying that "the governor hasn't exactly been willing to come to the table. He drew a line in the sand and said go figure it out." Clark concluded her remarks Friday by saying: "We need him to be here."

The strategy is to portray Pawlenty as an absentee governor, especially one interested in being vice president of the United States.

But there's a more practical reason for Pawlenty to resist the line item: Why should he be the bad guy?

"What's in play here is the VP possibility," Senjem offered. "They're trying to paint Pawlenty as an ineffective governor."

Rep. Jim Abeler, a Republican from Anoka who drew much fire for voting to override Pawlenty's veto on the transportation bill, is firmly in the governor's corner this time around.

"Whatever he vetoes is going to stay vetoed," Abeler said this morning. "We need to make the decisions on what's actually needed and what's just nice."

Abeler has no doubt that Pawlenty could come up with a better bill than what's been passed, but wonders why it should all fall on the governor. "If the governor line-itemed, it would be a tighter bill," Abeler said. "But it creates ill will, you know, Bemidji gets mad at him. And, you know, the governor likes the zoo."

*G.R. Anderson Jr. covers politics, the state Capitol and issues related to public safety.*

COMMUNITY VOICES

## Twin Cities must accept some unflattering truths, act to reduce disparities

By **MARY BRAINERD**  
and **JIM CAMPBELL**

The Twin Cities region faces a number of critical challenges as we consider our future. Our willingness and ability to proactively and effectively address issues such as affordable housing, quality health care, job creation, transportation, and education will determine whether the region remains one of the best places in the world to work and live.

In order to effectively address these issues, we must accept some unflattering and troubling truths about our region:

1) Despite our impressive historical overall performance, we have significant social and economic disparities on nearly every indicator. For example, while we have an average household income that is among the highest in the nation, our average black household income is among the lowest.

2) The populations that are struggling most with these disparities — nonwhite and poor residents — are growing rapidly as a percentage of our population. Therefore, without intervention we will trend downward on nearly every socio-economic indicator.

3) There are very few among us who are not exacerbating or reinforcing these disparities. These disparities are the product of decisions made every day by thousands and thousands of

individuals and organizations around the region. Decisions such as whom to hire, where to live, and even with whom to have lunch can hurt or help.

### Consequences will have statewide impact

Nearly three years ago, the Itasca Project commissioned a study from the Brookings Institution to help us understand the magnitude and implications of the disparities in the region. The findings in its “Mind the Gap” report were a call to action for us — as citizens and as employers. These disparities not only offend our sensibilities about the community we want to live in, they have very real, adverse fiscal and economic consequences for our region — consequences that will impact all of Minnesota.

Perhaps the most clear and unsettling economic effect of these growing disparities will be on the quality of our future workforce. The children who are in the workforce pipeline today have a poverty rate more than twice as high as the baby boomers they will replace. Given all we know about the link between poverty and low educational attainment, this has enormous negative implications for our region’s economic competitiveness.

These are issues of the heart and of the mind.

Itasca Project participants, based on these findings, have committed to take on a number

of initiatives to directly impact these disparities — for example, our strategic planning work with the Minneapolis Public Schools. In addition, we are committed to telling everyone we can about these issues and encouraging action. Our speaker’s bureau has reached more than 12,000 residents in church, work and civic settings all around the region.

For many of you, these disparities are old news. The 2007 “Wilder Research Survey of Twin Cities Region Residents” found that 91 percent of residents of our region have at least heard of these disparities. However, only about half of residents believe they are a big problem. To us, this means that there is still a significant need for education on this topic.

### ‘Close the Gap’ series to begin Sunday

For that reason, we have partnered with Twin Cities Public Television to develop a five-part documentary series that brings the facts to life with the stories of organizations and individuals who are facing these issues every day. The series will premiere on tpt Channel 2 Sunday at 6 p.m. with “Close the Gap: The Case for Change,” a one-hour summary of the five episodes (which will air the following five Saturdays on Channel 17).

While the facts may be depressing, the series is not. Each episode focuses on ways people

are making a positive difference. Our intention is to help inspire more such action.

We are not naïve enough to believe that small, individual gestures are all that is needed. The scope of the challenges facing our region will require actions both large and small, involving thoughtful public policy and creative private-sector initiative.

The Itasca Project is a non-partisan alliance and our participants span the political spectrum. While we may not always agree on the most appropriate mechanisms to help reduce disparities, we all agree that these growing disparities require immediate attention and effort from all of us.

There are innumerable ways that you can help — from teaching a child to read to offering to carpool with a colleague with limited transportation options. For more ideas and information on these disparities, please visit Twin Cities Compass.

We hope that you will tune in this Sunday and throughout the series. We think you’ll agree — and hope you’ll help spread the word — that addressing our region’s socioeconomic disparities is not just the right thing to do, it is the smart thing to do.

*Mary Brainerd and Jim Campbell are co-chairs of the Itasca Project. Brainerd is the CEO of HealthPartners; Jim Campbell retired as CEO of Wells Fargo MN.*

### Want to add your voice?

If you’re interested in joining the discussion by writing a Community Voices article, email Susan Albright at [salbright@minnpost.com](mailto:salbright@minnpost.com).