

Should the U.S. intervene in Myanmar?

By SHARON SCHMICKLE

In 1999, two airplanes flew repeatedly over Kosovo — in defiance of the Yugoslavian government and its threatening surface-to-air missiles — in order to drop food to ethnic Albanians who were trapped on the brink of starvation.

The organizers of that bold mission now watch from Minneapolis as world leaders debate whether it is time to defy the junta that controls Myanmar and impose a similar drop of desperately needed provisions for the victims of Cyclone Nargis.

There is precedence for foreign intervention when a humanitarian crisis reaches the proportions it has in Myanmar since the cyclone left more than a million Burmese without shelter, clean water and food, said J. Brian Atwood, who arranged for the Kosovo drops. At the time Atwood directed the U.S. Agency for International Development. Today he is dean of the Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota.

But pulling off such a mission never is easy, Atwood said.

Our compelling moral obligation to help suffering people clashes with global politics and deeply ingrained respect for the rights of sovereignty.

Brian Atwood, then General Director of USAID, visiting a refugee camp in Tirana, Kosovo, April 21, 1999.

REUTERS Brian Atwood, then General Director of USAID, visiting a refugee camp in Tirana, Kosovo, April 21, 1999.



REUTERS

A woman sifts through the debris of her home destroyed by Cyclone Nargis near Kunyangan.

“Your instincts and your values are always present, but you have practical matters to consider,” Atwood said. “You can be faced with a terrible dilemma that you know people are going to be dying and you can’t do a lot about it.”

In Myanmar, where the military government is so paranoid it views foreign relief workers as hostile forces, negotiations have opened only a trickle of aid into the country.

Jan Egeland, the former U.N. emergency relief coordinator, expressed the frustration many around the world are voicing when he

told Time Magazine last week: “A lot is at stake here. If we let them get away with murder we may set a very dangerous precedent.”

But the alternatives, Egeland said, are extremely risky: “You have to think it through — do you want to secure an area of the country by military force? What kinds of potential security risks would that create? I can’t imagine any humanitarian organization wanting to shoot their way in with food.”

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MINNPOST.WORLD

California's same-sex marriage ruling could spread to rest of union

By STEVE BERG

What happens in California rarely stays in California.

The nation's largest state often serves as a cultural harbinger, a place that sets the national tone on everything from food to fashion to fantasy. Thursday's historic state Supreme Court decision validating same-sex marriage may be difficult to contain within California's borders, especially if it survives a tempestuous ballot initiative fight expected in November. That fight, in turn, could spill over to the presidential election, with ramifications in California and beyond.

Thursday's decision came from what's generally considered a conservative court. The 4-3 ruling said that same-sex unions must be permitted the "respect and dignity" that marriage bestows. It's not equal enough that gay couples in California, as in nine other states, already enjoy equal rights and benefits. They must be afforded the same "marriage" as other couples under the law. To view marriage otherwise would be to discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation, something the court was not prepared to do.

"One of the core elements embodied in the state constitutional right to marry is the right of an individual and a couple to have their own official family relationship accorded respect and dignity equal to that accorded the family relationships of other couples," Chief Justice Ronald George wrote for the majority.

State laws that limit gay unions to domestic-partnership status "impinge upon the fundamental interests of same-sex couples," he wrote, adding that there is no compelling state interest in standing in the way of same-sex marriage.

But Justice Marvin Baxter wrote for the minority that the court "does not have the right to erase, then recast, the age-old definition of marriage, as virtually all societies have understood it, in order to satisfy its own contemporary notions of equality and justice."



REUTERS

Lorri L. Jean, left, and Gina Calvelli share a piece of wedding cake at a demonstration in West Hollywood, Calif., celebrating the California Supreme Court's decision overturning a ban on same-sex marriages.

Backlash begins anew

Critics lashed out against activist judges, predicting that voters would overturn Thursday's ruling. California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger signaled, however, that he would not try to undermine the court's decision and repeated his vow to oppose a ballot measure that would overturn it. "I respect the court's decision and, as governor, I will uphold its ruling," he said.

Massachusetts is the only other state to have embedded gay marriage in law. In 2003 its high court struck down a ban against same-sex marriage using a narrower legal theory. More recently, high courts in New York, New Jersey and Washington have declined to extend marriage rights to gay couples.

Thursday's decision arose from San Francisco's surge of gay weddings, which, in 2004, spurred a conservative backlash. Several states later passed constitutional amendments banning same-sex marriage. The San Francisco "experiment" ended a month after it began when the State Supreme Court intervened. It reconsidered after a series of lower Court cases, reaching back six decades to a case that overturned the state's ban on interracial marriages.

The court left open possible ac-

tion by the state legislature to employ a term other than "marriage" to denote state-sanctioned unions as long as the term was used across the board to describe both same and opposite-sex unions. That lays open a potential compromise allowing "marriage" to retain its religious meaning while state law calls it something else.

California's chief justice emphasized Thursday that the court's action does not require ministers, priests or rabbis to perform same-sex marriage ceremonies. He added that the decision did "not affect the constitutional validity of the existing prohibitions against polygamy and the marriage of close relatives."

On PBS' News Hour, Geoffrey Kors, director of Equality California, praised the ruling. "The key thing the court ruled," he said, "is that the equal protection clause of the state constitution requires just that: equality. And domestic partnership or any other status that is not identical in name, rights and benefits violates the constitution.

"It's hard to argue that the equal protection clause ... allows anything else but equal protection," he added.

Jordan Lorence, attorney for the Allied Defense Fund, disagreed. "This shows why we need to have this issue decided by a

constitutional amendment passed by the people [rather than by judges]," he said. "A bare 4-3 majority ruling this way, nullifying a vote of the people just eight years ago that almost two-thirds of Californians voted to define marriage as one man and one woman. That is not an act of bigotry; that is an act of common sense, good, reasonable public policy that's existed since the dawn of time."

The California ballot campaign may offer an indication of changes in the way Americans view gay marriage. Tolerance for homosexual rights has increased in recent decades, according to polls. <http://www.pollingreport.com/civil.htm>

Americans now appear to be equally divided between those who favor government sanction of gay marriage or civil unions and those who oppose them. When the term "marriage" is used, however, the approval numbers drop.

The issue's potential impact on the presidential race was unclear on Thursday, largely because the likely party nominees have similar views.

Republican John McCain defines marriage as a union between a man and a woman, but opposes a constitutional ban on same-sex marriage. He wants individual states to decide the issue. Democrat Barack Obama opposes same-sex marriage, supports civil unions and opposes a constitutional ban. (Hillary Rodham Clinton, who won California's Democratic primary and the majority of its delegates, has expressed similar views to Obama's.)

California conservatives hope for greater division on the question than that. If the initiative energizes enough religious conservatives to make California competitive, the Republican nominee could gain an advantage nationally. Even the most optimistic Democrat would doubt that Barack Obama could win the White House without winning California.

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Here's how to make Minnesota a better place

ELIZABETH GORMAN

How would young people make Minnesota a better place to live?

That's the question a group called Students Speak Out put to members of Generation Y — also known as the Google Generation or iGeneration — as part of a video-blogging contest to celebrate Minnesota's 150 years of statehood.

Immigration, violence in schools and global warming are among the issues addressed by metro high school students in the inaugural competition called "I am Minnesota's Future."

"This contest gives an excellent opportunity for our young leaders to have a say in the public policy making process," said Scott Croonquist, executive director of the Association of Metropolitan School Districts,

who judged the contest along with eight others active in media and public affairs.

Students Speak Out is a new social-networking Web site launched in Minneapolis and later in Milwaukee by the Citizens League. The organization is trying to involve young people as active citizens by meeting them where they are — on the Web, according to its project director, Stacy Becker.

"Students do the same thing online that many adults do in their meetings around a table," she said. "We've been experimenting with different models for creating an opportunity for their voices. The contest is one."

Powerful communications tool

Shauneida Tatum, 16, and her after-school group Polar

Producers at North High School in Minneapolis chose to address violence in the "vlog" she submitted, which was judged the winning entry among group submissions. There were nine entries.

"I hope it's shown to people who will think twice about taking stuff that we need away from us. I want them to support the programs in my video and help whomever else trying to get a youth program started," Tatum said.

One of the contest judges, Bill Hanley, executive vice president of Twin Cities Public Television, said video produced by young people is an effective way to get policy makers to listen to youth, who might know more about certain issues, such as school violence or bullying.

"For the more experienced young producers, I hope they

will find in the process reinforcement that video is the most powerful communications tool ever invented," Hanley said. "And young people can learn to use it to improve the society that we all share."

The finalists' videos will be broadcasted on YouTube and the Citizens League Facebook Web page, as well as presented at the Citizens League's annual meeting and at the sesquicentennial tent at the Minnesota State Fair.

Winners receive Best Buy gift certificates and a Sony digital camcorder.

Elizabeth Gorman is a freelance journalist from Minneapolis. She reports on international issues and works at Minneapolis Public Schools as a Spanish bilingual educator.

White Bear Lake hooks next year's Fishing Opener, a metro first

JOE KIMBALL

For the first time, the Governor's Fishing Opener will be in the metro area: on White Bear Lake next May 8 and 9.

Credit for the metro coup goes to Bill Foussard, owner of the White Bear Country Inn and Rudy's Red Eye Grill in downtown White Bear Lake.

Foussard is having a good year: He was named King Boreas Rex of the St. Paul Winter Carnival in January and now, after four years of trying, he's lured the opener to White Bear.

"This will be a great chance

to highlight White Bear — to market White Bear," he said.

The fishing opener, a state tradition since 1948, has always been outside the metro area, usually up north. It was in Red Wing about 10 years ago, which is about as close as it usually gets.

This year, Gov. Tim Pawlenty caught two northerns, two walleye and a perch -- and lots of attention for his remarks about the first lady -- on Big Pelican Lake in Breezy Point.

White Bear outbid several other communities for the 2009 opener. The cities must show

that they can handle 300 guests, line up 100 guides or hosts for the fishing groups and feed up to several thousand people in a free, community picnic on the opening weekend, said Curt Johnson of Explore Minnesota.

Sponsors, too, must be secured; the state doesn't pay for the event. Only the picnic is open to the public. The fishing expedition is limited to media and VIPs.

Foussard said it took some effort to get the opener in the Twin Cities area. "There's a lot of tourism in the metro, too," he said. "And we kept telling

them about all the great things in White Bear, and how beneficial it would be to come here."

Is there lots of pressure to make sure the governor actually catches something?

"They'll catch lots of fish," Foussard said. "This is White Bear Lake."

And I'm betting he'll reserve a very nice room at his hotel for the governor and Mrs. Pawlenty, if she's not in the mood for fishing.

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Joel Kramer, CEO and editor

Should the U.S. intervene in Myanmar?

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Indeed, the aid organizations agonize over how forcefully to even argue for better access, said Hugh Parmer, president of the American Refugee Committee in Minneapolis. He worked with Atwood on the Kosovo air drop in 1999.

"If we act more forcefully, we may cut off the aid they already have," Parmer said. "We don't want to shut down this gradual opening."

Never again?

After World War II, the world said "never again" would civilized people and nations stand by and allow slaughter comparable to the Jewish Holocaust.

The words "never again" echoed in the Twin Cities and around the world in the 1990s after the Hutu government in Rwanda slaughtered minority Tutsis.

The same words sounded again in this decade when ethnic Africans were attacked in Sudan's Darfur region and driven from their villages.

Never seems to come again and again.

The unfolding crisis in Myanmar differs substantially from the Holocaust and other catastrophic episodes of ethnic cleansing. It is a government denying life-saving aid to its own people, not an attack on an ethnic minority.

Yet, the crisis threatens to take on the proportions of those other tragedies in the sheer numbers of senseless deaths. And many people are striking some of the same moral arguments, reflected in summary by the famous words of Anglo-Irish statesman Edmund Burke: All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.

But what to do?

In its article — with the provocative headline "Is it time to invade Burma?" — Time reports that some experts, including another former USAID director, Andrew Natsios, have called on the United States to unilaterally

begin air drops to Burmese people regardless of what the junta says. The Bush administration has so far rejected the idea.

Parmer, of the American Refugee Committee, said it's worth considering.

An American Refugee Committee team has waited for a week in Thailand for visas to enter Myanmar and help the cyclone victims. Emergency supplies the committee had assembled probably will be delivered by a partner organization, World Vision, which has gained some access, he said.

While the controlling junta has allowed some aid shipments and a few relief workers from countries it counts as friends, it has denied access to the worst-hit areas in the Irrawaddy Delta. And relief workers told the New York Times the humanitarian aid that was delivered had been stolen and warehoused by the country's army.

Meanwhile, the French foreign minister, Bernard Kouchner, has called for the United Nations to invoke an agreement that could offer standing for countries to intervene collectively. The agreement, forged three years ago, holds that governments have a responsibility to protect their people from human rights abuse. Further, it says the international community must assume that responsibility if a government cannot or will not do so.

Any U.N. decision to invoke that "responsibility to protect" would require Security Council approval. And China and Russia almost surely would block it. But many are calling for world leaders to try anyway.

The United States and Britain should join the French government and introduce a resolution in the Security Council demanding that the Burmese government immediately allow the entry of international relief supplies and personnel into the country and allow the U.N. to take charge of the relief mission, Paul Stares of the Council on Foreign Relations and Ivo Daalder of the Brookings Institution said in an opinion ar-

ticle in the Boston Globe.

The resolution should hold open the possibility of additional measures — including air drops of relief supplies — if the government did not comply at once, they said.

The Kosovo example

How was it done in Kosovo?

In the spring of 1999, some 60,000 ethnic Albanians had fled their homes and hidden in the mountains as forces for then president Slobodan Milosevic hunted them down and NATO bombs rained on the countryside.

Their food was running dangerously low. And alarmed officials in Washington faced the prospect that Milosevic could accuse them of starving to death the very people the United States and NATO claimed to be rescuing.

Atwood, who then-President Bill Clinton had named as humanitarian coordinator for Kosovo, was called to a meeting in the Cabinet Room of the White House.

An ethnic Albanian woman feeds her baby as she and another 2,000 refugees walk to Macedonia, March 30, 1999.

Could military forces repeat what had been done earlier in Bosnia and drop food from planes? Too risky, said the military experts in the room. Milosevic's surface-to-air missiles could shoot down the planes.

Atwood volunteered to get it done, with the help of Parmer who at the time was USAID's assistant administrator for humanitarian relief.

They chartered two Soviet-made planes from Moldova and hired Moldovan pilots who were willing to fly over Kosovo.

At a U.S. air base in Italy, bright yellow stripes were painted on the undersides of the planes to signify that they were doing humanitarian work.

The Yugoslav government was notified of their specific flight plans and told it would be an international humanitarian mission. The response given through the BBC and other news organizations was that Belgrade would

consider the flights a hostile act.

Meanwhile, Atwood and Parmer worked with NATO commanders to secure a safe corridor where the planes could fly without being bombed by their own side.

For a week until the war ended and a few days beyond that, the sky over Kosovo rained 2,000-calorie packets of food. Belgrade initially responded with a spatter of resistance from the ground, but it subsided quickly, Parmer said.

In all, more than 10 tons of food were dropped.

Time is running out

A similar drop over Myanmar's hardest hit areas would be feasible, Parmer said, although it is not an efficient way to deliver food. A dangerous difference in Myanmar is that the junta could send planes to fight what it would see as an invasion of its air space. The Yugoslav air force had largely been grounded by NATO fire, he said.

With few alternatives almost two weeks past the cyclone's strike, time is running out, he said.

"I have no doubt that people have already died because of their reluctance to allow in Western aid," he said. "Two weeks is the point at which you begin to lose people to malnutrition."

Atwood and Parmer still express pride and satisfaction over their Kosovo mission. But they are cautious about prospects for repeating it, despite what many see as a moral imperative to help the Burmese people.

"There usually is a solution,"

Parmer said. "But governments are reluctant to apply forces in these circumstances despite all of our good intentions."

Meanwhile, the world stands waiting for the body count once again.

Sharon Schmickle writes about foreign affairs and science. She can be reached at sschmickle@minnpost.com.

THE DAILY GLEAN

Two bucks doesn't make you a smoking actor

By DAVID BRAUER

It was a good day in court for Olga Franco, the alleged van driver accused of killing four Cottonwood school kids. First, a federal agent testified that Franco was not alone in the van, the Strib's Pam Louwagie reports. This could complicate pinning the crime on Franco. Prosecutors contend no evidence "even remotely suggest[s]" someone else was driving. AP says a judge also ruled certain Franco statements inadmissible because of Miranda violations.

Everyone laps up a Scott County judge's slap-down of an Elko bar's pro-smoking "theater nights." Jurist Jerome Abrams said merely paying \$2 for a "Actor's Guild" pin doesn't make one an actor, the Strib's Mary Lynn Smith notes. The PiPress's Jason Hoppin says the bar owner will start writing scripts to beef up the theatrical cred; that should be fun for all. The judge's restraining order is limited; bars elsewhere plan to keep going until stopped.

DFLers agreed to Gov. Pawlenty's 3.9 percent property-tax cap, writes the PiPress's Rachel Stassen-Berger. The offer might not last long, she adds. DFLers want \$75 million more in state local-government aid, plus \$30 million in direct aid to homeowners. The gov wonders how the \$155 million (in the next biennium) will be paid for.

Cargill is adding to the nation's arsenal of artificial sweeteners — but there's a good backstory, the Strib's Matt McKinney reports. The

non-sugar is called Truvia. Unsurprisingly, the company's research says it's safe for humans! Truvia is a derivative of the South American shrub stevia, which the FDA has ruled unsafe. (The PiPress is more upbeat about the product.) Note to tea drinkers: some Celestial Seasonings brews contain stevia, but the company slipped the FDA noose by relabeling them dietary supplements.

State unemployment hit a four-year high in April, the PiPress's Julie Forster notes. The Strib's Mike Meyers says six months of employment growth were wiped out by a 10,100-job decline. Construction and manufacturing were hardest hit. Finance & Commerce reports that the state actually has 19,000 more jobs than a year ago, but Meyers notes that's not enough to keep ahead of population growth. Our 4.8-percent unemployment rate is below the nation's 5 percent average.

More unemployment: State population growth is slowing because of our job sickness, state economist Tom Stinson posits. New unemployment claims aren't rising, but the number of Minnesotans exhausting 26 weeks of benefits is.

Hat tip to Citypages.com for tipping me to a long USA Today story featuring Minneapolis's Hawthorne neighborhood. The story highlights residents' lawsuit against mortgage companies for accepting inflated appraisals and neglecting the subsequently foreclosed properties. [Note: if you haven't been paying attention, USA Today

has steadily made itself into a quality news source.]

Fresh off the "smiley-faced" murder exposé, KSTP's Kristi Piehl digs into state spending on education diversity. It's an \$85 million a year program — successful, the Pawlenty administration says — but Piehl focuses on \$293,163 spent for food. One school board is being fed every month. The legislative auditor favors tougher oversight, but lawmakers haven't acted. The Taxpayer's League gets a shout-out for fingering the spending. Drink a shot every time Piehl stresses "your money."

Jesse Ventura is talking about running for U.S. Senate. He has a book out. Need we say more? OK, just this: only 50 people turned out for a book-signing at the Mall of America, the Strib's Sarah Lemagie reports.

Vetoes in 30 seconds: As expected, Pawlenty nixed the minimum wage bill, the Strib reports. He wants tipped waiters to be paid less. He also vetoed a bill raising the standard of evidence for removing "criminally suspect care workers from contact with children," and a "paint stewardship bill" that would levy a 40-cent tax to aid responsible paint disposal.

On the other hand: the guv said OK to 4 a.m. bar time for the GOP convention, the PiPress's Tad Vezner reports. The St. Paul City Council, which initially opposed the move, seems likely to OK some scheme, but a plan hasn't coalesced.

Today's talker: 19-year-olds. One threw himself into a

Roseville wood chipper — and survived. Another, serving as an NWA Airlink flight attendant, forced his plane to land by setting fire to an airplane bathroom. He was mad he had to work a Minneapolis-Saskatchewan route. I know flying's become a low-wage business, but they let teens be flight attendants?!

Jammie Thomas might get a new trial; she's the Brainerd woman fined \$222,000 in the nation's first illegal music downloading conviction. Thomas actually uploaded music, but prosecutors might have to prove someone — other than authorities — downloaded it, AP reports. Federal Judge Michael J. Davis said he might've mistakenly instructed jurors last fall. The Strib's Larry Oakes says settlement talks are likely.

Entertaining report from WCCO's Frank Vascellaro on rising prices at the Nicollet Mall Farmer's Market. Of course, this time of year it's all non-local stuff affected by high transportation costs, so we're not too sympathetic.

Oy: Carl Eller. Now he's been cited for riding his motorcycle without specially coded license plates denoting past alcohol offenses, KSTP reports.

Nort spews: The Twins are fully back to earth and back to .500 after being swept at home by the Blue Jays. The Strib's Judd Zulgad has a nice update on the Pohlad family's plans to create an all-sports station. That's right, another one, considering KFAN and its AM cousin KFXN. The Pohlads have cash while KFAN's parent is debt-saddled.

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.

COMMUNITY VOICES

Superdelegates, soccer spur readers to comment

MinnPost commenters had lots to say about counting in recent days — adding up convention delegates, taxes, D.C. living expenses and electoral votes. Other popular topics ranged from genetically modified food to a soccer move. Here's a sampling:

John E. Iacono commented on Eric Black's May 9 post, "The superdelegate dam is breaking":

As the tide seems inexorably to swing toward Obama, I reflect again on the statement of a dem friend last fall: "If Clinton gets it, I'll have to vote for McCain; if Obama gets it, I'll have a problem."

Once the primaries are over and the choice is made, I will begin counting the days — until the campaigns turn back to the ugliness of yesteryear.

If the two last standing can manage to keep it civil and on the issues, I'll have to vote for whoever I see as having done the most to promote that.

It seems to me that going at it about the economy should be a great context for selecting a candidate. All other topics, not so much.

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Harry Melander opined on the May 7 Community Voices essay, "Of legislators and subsidies: When will they ever learn?" by Phil Krinkie, former chairman of the Minnesota House Taxes Committee and president of the Taxpayers League of Minnesota:

"Dr. No" strikes again. For-

mer Rep. Phil Krinkie needs a new act. If it were up to Friendly Phil, Minnesota would still be the backdrop for "Little House on the Prairie." No convention centers, no professional venues, no theaters, and buildings would be two stories or less. No one likes public subsidies, but the bottom line is that extraordinary projects typically need help. As a paid advocate for the Taxpayers League, Friendly Phil has the luxury of thumbing his nose at the prospect of 14,000 jobs. For all who are out of work, we beg to differ. ... If the MOA or any other group can bring 2 billion bucks to this economy and create thousands of jobs, we think that lawmakers should find a way to make it happen.

From Jon Miners:

Tax subsidies aren't popular with anybody. But I think it would be a mistake to extrapolate the experience with Northwest Airlines to the Mall of America or anyone else. The airline industry is inherently unstable, and just about all about them are constantly on the brink of bankruptcy. They simply are not now nor have they ever been in a position to keep any promises they make. It's a mistake for legislators to assume otherwise.

On the other hand the Mall is a pretty stable business, and I think would be a reliable partner.

••••

Karl Bremer reacted to Catharine Richert's May 9 story, "Political penny pinchers: Minnesota's con-

gressional delegation tries to cut Washington living expenses":

Housing costs in Washington may be double what they are in Minnesota. But let's remember that members of Congress earn \$169,300 a year, plus a healthy expense account for travel. That's certainly more than double the salary of the average Minnesotan. And some members collect other paychecks as well. Michele Bachmann, for example, collects federal farm subsidy checks for their family farm in Wisconsin, and is part owner of her family's medical clinic in Lake Elmo. So I'm not so sure "sticker shock" at housing costs for members of Congress is really high on my list of concerns these days, when people are sleeping on sidewalk heat grates within view of our nation's capitol.

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Dave Wright commented on Jay Weiner's Tuesday post, "Realism — and the future — prompts Thunder to end soccer-in-the-city experiment":

Soccer in St. Paul didn't fail. The stadium did. It was a bad marriage from the start. Jay is right about Griffin. It was built for high school football in the 1940s and it looks it. Give the team a better facility and it could have a chance to succeed.

Here are excerpts from a comment by Brian Quarstad:

Jay, Most of what you say is pretty close to on. But there a few things you haven't take into

consideration.

First, I think the move is most likely the right thing for the team. But ... the Thunder were in the city during a period of time when the (former) owners claimed they didn't have the capital to shell out for much of anything. The team camps are the only thing that kept them afloat.

During this time the money spent on players dropped to the lowest in the league and the team play on the field reflected this same drop. ... There was no cash for marketing and no staff for it either, as the team was run on a shoestring budget. You can't draw fans with a losing team and no marketing.

Recently the team pulled off a coup by hiring away Xcel Center marketing guru Peter Johns. As well, the team has increased the player budget by more than 200 percent and this has already started to prove fruitful as the team is currently 3-1-0. Had the team continued to stay in the city, with the renewed team, a true marketing man at the helm and a marketing budget that was far beyond anything it had in the past, the Thunder were poised to actually make soccer in the city work. ...

Why is it that I always hear that soccer should be played in Blaine, when all other sports seem to be suited just fine for downtown St. Paul or Minneapolis? The team will be back in the city someday. It's where it belongs.

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.