

## This year, a fractured nation yearns for unity

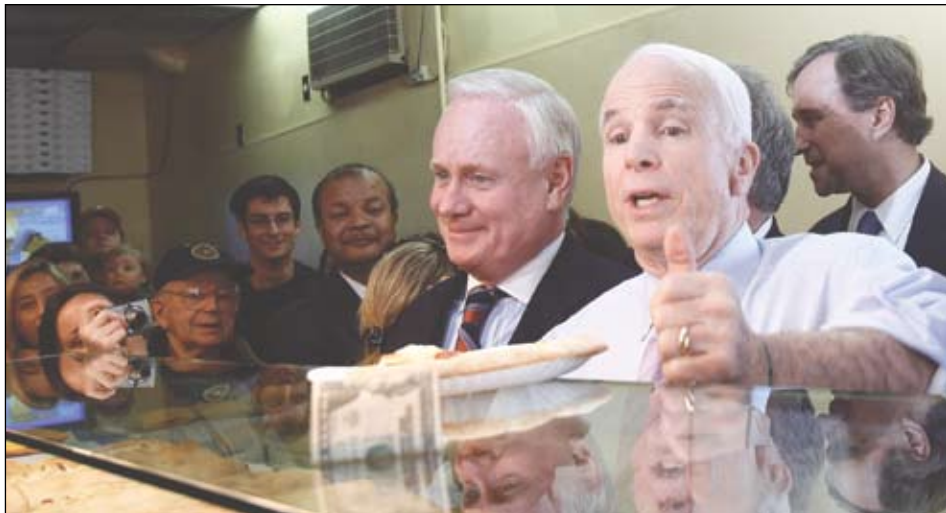
Today each person gets to have his or her own version of reality, and voters have sorted themselves into like-minded geographical enclaves. Yet the underlying theme to the John McCain-Barack Obama contest now unfolding is a national longing for some kind of glue that can bind us together during difficult times.

By **STEVE BERG**

Perhaps the greatest change of the past 50 years came when somebody dropped mass culture on the floor and it shattered into a million pieces.

In the mid-1950s, Americans of every age and station could sing along to “Davy, Davy Crocket, king of the wild frontier.” They could identify Elvis Presley, Little Richard, Doris Day, Willie Mays, Ed Sullivan, Nat King Cole, Yellowstone Park and a Chevrolet Bel Air. There was even general agreement about the “facts” delivered in the morning papers or on the evening news.

Today each person gets to have his or her own version of reality. Our country has been sliced and diced into market segments unimaginable a few decades past. Fame is a narrower concept. There are many famous people I’ve never heard of. Many of those whose names I recognize would be strangers to me on the street. I couldn’t pick Lil Wayne out of a lineup, or Justin Timberlake, Britt-



By **SHANNON STAPLETON, Reuters**

Sen. John McCain gives a thumbs up after paying for a slice of pizza at Verrazano Pizza in New York.

ney Spears, Brad Paisley or Sidney Crosby. They are not in my niche.

Politics, too, has its rigid segments, stoked by a vastly expanded array of lobbies. Hundreds of blogs and dozens of talking heads push their own slants. And voters have sorted themselves into like-minded geographical enclaves where the red and blue tribes rarely mix.

### A national longing

It’s hard to run for president in such a segmented world. Yet the underlying theme to the John McCain-Barack Obama contest now

unfolding is a national longing for some kind of unity, some kind of glue that can break down the market segments, bind us together and move us forward through difficult times.

That is the unspoken longing that propelled Obama to his surprising capture of the Democratic nomination. And McCain, too, realizes that he cannot win with only the tiny segment that believes George W. Bush has been a good president.

**continues on page 4**

### INSIDE

#### MINNPOST.WORLD

As President Bush looks forward to a meeting with Pope Benedict XVI on Friday, the protesters’ greeting he received upon arriving in Rome emphasized what a German newspaper today termed the “unfriendly background music” on his final European tour as president.  
**page 2**

#### PAT BORZI

Home runs or not, The Twins’ Joe Mauer is back among the league’s best hitters.  
**page 3**

#### DAVID BRAUER

The Daily Glean: NR considers extending ban on lead shot.  
**page 5**

#### COMMUNITY VOICES

Sex and taxes: a musing on relationships and correlations.  
**page 6**

MINNPOST.WORLD

# Europeans aren't striking up band for Bush's farewell tour

By SUSAN ALBRIGHT

As President Bush looks forward to a meeting with Pope Benedict XVI in Rome on Friday, the protesters' greeting he received as he arrived in Rome on Wednesday emphasized what a German newspaper today termed the "unfriendly background music" that has accompanied him on his final European tour as president.

A Spiegel Online piece titled "The punching bag's farewell" gave a wrap-up. "'Unfriendly background music' is the phrase used by the respected conservative daily Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung to describe the raft of highly critical comments and reporting on George W. Bush's final visit to Europe as an American president. The paper was reacting to comments such as 'memory of Bush will darken America's image in the world for years to come,' as the country's other leading daily, the Süddeutsche Zeitung put it. There was even Bush-bashing from within the ranks of Chancellor Angela Merkel's own Christian Democratic Union (CDU) party, whose foreign policy spokesman, Eckart von Klaeden, remarked: 'I won't miss George W. Bush.' ...

"Noting that Bush was staying at Meseberg Palace in the countryside far from populous Berlin, the head of the market liberal Free Democratic Party (FDP), Guido Westerwelle, said 'anyone who is entrenched and barricaded, isn't visiting a country, but rather avoiding any contact with it. Other than a few photo ops, this visit is meaningless.' "

And while the president's trip has made news, largely for remarks about his rhetoric during the run-up to the Iraq war and for renewed threats toward Iran, coverage of the tour clearly treats it as ceremonial – and the president as largely irrelevant at this point.

## Stirring up apathy?

"It's a bruising schedule: six



By PAWEL KOPCZYNSKI, Reuters  
President Bush and German Chancellor Angela Merkel talk during a news conference outside Berlin on Wednesday.

stopovers and countless leaders in the space of a week." wrote Peter Walker wrote in a Guardian of London blog piece titled "Bush stirs up apathy around EU."

"But does anyone really care what George Bush gets up to on his whirlwind farewell tour of Europe? ... The problem here is Bush himself, who, even by the usual lame duck standards of term-end presidents, is hobbling somewhat pathetically out of the limelight."

Still, as London's Times Online reported after Bush's meeting and news conference with German Chancellor Angela Merkel, "President Bush issued a swift reminder yesterday that he was still willing, if necessary, to use America's military might against Iran, as he sought to prod a reluctant German Chancellor into supporting tougher sanctions and severing economic ties with the Islamic Republic. ... Mrs Merkel delighted the White House by backing possible EU action, as well as promising to order German banks to disentangle themselves from Tehran. 'If Iran does not meet its commitments further sanctions will have to follow,' she said."

The report continued: "She

added that any such measures would be most effective if they were agreed by the UN Security Council. Diplomats see this last comment as code for delay."

At a press conference with Merkel, the Times reported, "Mr Bush twice stated that 'all options are on the table' in punishing Iran's defiance over its nuclear ambitions — 'and the choice is theirs to make.' "

## Regret for rhetoric

The paper pointed out that "His warning came less than 24 hours after publication of an interview with the Times in which he expressed regret for using language that convinced much of the world he was 'really anxious for war' in Iraq and Afghanistan."

That was referring to an earlier interview on Air Force One over the Atlantic in which Bush defended the Iraq war.

"But the swagger, the rejection of criticism as invalid is gone," the Times reported of the president's tone, "and he acknowledges that the diplomacy should have been handled better. 'Look, I think that in retrospect, you know, I could have used a different tone, a different rhetoric....' "

As the president moves from Italy to Paris on Friday and then to London and Belfast, he may or may not encounter protests as large as Rome's, but it's probably safe to say that he will continue to be dogged by critiques such as this, from Handelsblatt, a German business daily:

"Bush junior wasn't up to the challenge following the attacks of September 11, 2001 because he let himself be pushed into an unwarranted war by listening to the wrong advisers, and thereby prevented a broad front against terrorism. Constructive Middle East policy was made more difficult, and the regime in Iran was strengthened. Bush didn't just boycott the Kyoto Protocol, he persistently undermined it -- and thereby helped polluters such as China. With this unilateralism Bush damaged America's reputation."

Such is Bush's legacy – at least for now.

*Susan Albright, a MinnPost managing editor, writes about national and foreign developments. She can be reached at salbright@minnpost.com.*

# Joe Mauer is back among league's best hitters



**PAT BORZI**

The pitch wasn't a strike. A year ago, maybe even a month ago, Joe Mauer might have taken it without a second thought.

But in the seventh inning on June 2, with the Minnesota Twins trailing the Yankees 5-4 at the Metrodome, Mauer had an idea. Veteran Yankees lefthander Andy Pettitte mainly pitched Mauer inside his first three at-bats, preventing him from extending his arms the way he likes and limiting him to one single. With a 1-1 count, Mauer expected Pettitte to go inside again.

Pettitte did. And that's why Pettitte was so upset after Mauer pulled the pitch for his first home run of the season, off the upper deck facing in right. Pettitte's brutal honesty, which the nation discovered during the Roger Clemens/steroids controversy, surfaced again here as he described how Mauer outsmarted him.

"It was a critical mistake on my part," Pettitte told assembled reporters in the hallway outside the Yankee clubhouse. "I gave him a chance to hurt me on the inside corner. He cheated to get to it, probably trying to take me deep."

By "cheated," Pettitte meant that Mauer had anticipated an inside fastball and reacted a fraction of a second early, intending to drive the ball — something Mauer and hitting coach Joe Vavra had been working on for several weeks. Pettitte had no way of knowing that, though.

"It's as ignorant a pitch as I can throw," Pettitte said. "I'd already shown it to him once in that at-bat."

Two days later, Mauer — who had not homered off a lefthanded pitcher since 2006 — said Pettitte was right. "He was pounding me in inside all night," Mauer said. "It was a pitch that was up a little bit, off the plate in, but I was kind of looking in there."

"Normally I probably wouldn't swing at something like that, but he was in there quite a bit, and I felt like I could handle it. Certain pitchers you can take chances like that."

Baltimore Orioles lefthanded reliever Jamie Walker, a former Detroit Tiger, also fit that category. Walker usually works Mauer inside, too, and Mauer guessed right again June 4, cracking his second homer in three days into the upper deck in right.

## Two homers in three days quiets critics — for now

That, at least temporarily, quieted the critics who rip Mauer for not hitting more home runs. It's been a point of discussion ever since the Twins traded A.J. Pierzynski after the 2003 season and turned the everyday catching job over to Mauer, the low-key St. Paul product and the No. 1 overall choice in the 2001 amateur draft.

The Twins drafted Mauer over the often-injured Mark Prior in a cost-saving move; Prior's agent, Scott Boras, wanted much more for his client than the \$5.15 million signing bonus Mauer eventually accepted. That decision proved one of the best in club history.

Two years ago, Mauer hit .347 to become the first catcher to win a major-league batting title since Ernie Lombardi of the Boston Braves in 1942. Before Mauer,

no American League catcher had ever done it. The Twins rewarded the arbitration-eligible Mauer with a four-year, \$33 million deal.

Last year, a series of left leg injuries and a hernia limited Mauer to a .293 average in 109 games as the Twins slumped to their first losing record since 2000. Torii Hunter publicly questioned Mauer's ability to play through injuries, which annoyed him, though he never criticized Hunter publicly.

"I've talked to him about it, and he told me it was kind of taken out of context," Mauer said. "First of all, he's never caught or had to deal with anything like that. It's different. But there are things you can play through and things you can't. If he knew how I was feeling, he probably would have known I play through pretty much everything."

Healthy again, Mauer's back among league-leading hitters

Healthy now, Mauer is contending for another A.L. batting title; his .327 average through Monday ranked second to Milton Bradley of Texas at .340. When Mauer won in '06, he hit .452 in June, his best month. Mauer appears on a similar track with a .417 start this month.

In the latest All-Star balloting, Mauer trailed Jason Varitek of the Red Sox by about 51,000 votes in the closest race at any American League position. Given Boston's sellout attendance and national popularity, Varitek might hold on, leaving Mauer to perhaps be chosen as a reserve for the second time in his career.

Mauer's average at the Metrodome (.373) and against lefties (.365) are up significantly over

last year. Mauer has hit lefties so well that manager Ron Gardenhire no longer wedges the righthanded Michael Cuddyer between Mauer and Justin Morneau to break up the batting order.

"More than anything, I see consistent at-bats," Cuddyer said in contrasting Mauer from last season to now. "There's nothing different about his swing or his approach. But last year, he would play three weeks, then be out two weeks. Now he's healthy and able to play every day."

Getting the private and increasingly guarded Mauer to talk about himself can be like asking Derek Jeter who he's dating this month. Mauer had a minor surgical procedure in the off-season that he declined to specify this spring. "It wasn't baseball-related, but I feel better," he said last week. "I had a lot of things going on last year. I'm just glad it's behind me."

That's all the detail Mauer chooses to offer, because, he said, it isn't anybody's business. "It's something that doesn't need to be out there," he said. "It's not really relevant to anything. Just something I needed to take care of, and I got it taken care of."

But bring up the one criticism Mauer hears the most — that, at 6-foot-5 and 230 pounds, he should hit more home runs than he does — and you'll hear plenty of feedback from Mauer and those around him.

**Read the complete story at [www.minnpost.com](http://www.minnpost.com).**

*Pat Borzi, a Minneapolis-based freelance writer and a frequent contributor to the New York Times, writes about sports for MinnPost.com.*

## MinnPost in Print

MinnPost in Print includes highlights of MinnPost.com, a new daily providing high-quality journalism for people everywhere who care about Minnesota. MinnPost in Print is distributed at selected locations in the Twin

Cities, but anyone can print a copy from a PDF available at [www.minnpost.com](http://www.minnpost.com). Visit the website for audio, videos and more stories. We believe that high-quality journalism is not just a consumer good; it's a community asset

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

# This year, a fractured nation yearns for unity

continued from page 1

Broadening the base is a part of every presidential campaign, but the broadening began in the primaries. McCain emerged not because of his appeal to one of the Republican's narrow constituencies but because of his maverick reputation. Obama's appeal is that of a charismatic post-racial figure who transcends his party's list of special interests.

Once the Democratic nominee was obliged at nearly every stop to recite the checklist of party components (teachers, environmentalists, union guys, blacks, women, Latinos, gays, college kids, etc.). Obama's underlying message is that the components are irrelevant; the whole is all that matters and "change" is the only item on the agenda.

Rarely has he deviated from his elevated assumption of a post-racial, post-ethnic, post-generational world that, according to New York Times columnist Frank Rich, plays directly to the "casual, what's-the-big-deal manner of post-boomer Americans already swimming in our country's rapidly expanding demographic pool."

Some of Obama's appeal is even post-partisan; he has had the audacity to credit Republicans for some good ideas.

Whether the campaign proceeds on a higher plane or gets dragged down again is an open question. The conventional Republican tactic against Obama would be to emphasize his blackness as often as possible. (Fox News still clings to the Jeremiah Wright episode as if to remind viewers that Obama is black and hates America.)

Obama the elitist is another possible theme. How can we trust a terrible bowler who doesn't like NASCAR and, considering the sound of his last name, might be a Muslim?

Obama invited some of that criticism. But Democrats seem shyer about retaliating with attacks on McCain's age, or his checkered marital history, or the darker possibilities stemming from his prisoner of war experiences. It's not well known, for example, that upon returning from prison in Vietnam McCain dumped his first wife after she was badly disfigured in a car wreck.

Those kinds of tactics were perfected by GOP operatives Pat Buchanan in 1968 and 1972, Lee Atwater in the 1988, and Karl Rove in 2000 and 2004. The aim was to employ the cultural divisions of the 1960s – issues like race, patriotism, traditional values, guns and abortion – to divide Democratic voters. Brilliantly pursued, the tactic has helped Republicans win seven of the last 10 presidential elections.

Can the tactic win again? Or has it run its course, given the deep longing for national unity and strong concern over the economy, the war, the price of energy and health care and the damage of global warming? Whether these issues replace the cultural agenda in 2008 may depend on the candidates themselves.

Two notable pieces of writing help explore this ground: George Packer's essay "The Fall of Conservatism: Have the Republicans Run Out of Ideas?" published in the May 26 New Yorker magazine; and "The Big Sort: Why the Clustering of Like-Minded America Is Tearing Us Apart," a book by Bill Bishop with Robert Cushing.

Packer asserts that even if McCain wins the 1968-2008 conservative era has run out of gas. While scholars often trace its roots to William F. Buckley's lending of respectability to conservative politics in the 1950s and Barry Goldwater's run for the White House in 1964, Packer starts with Richard Nixon.

## Creating the 'silent majority'

It was Nixon (fed by Buchanan and Kevin Phillips) who employed his own biting class resentments against "limousine liberals" (he detested the Kennedys) to successfully move southern whites and northern ethnics into the Republican column. Anger over civil rights, war protesters, media elitists, welfare queens and the peace-love-pot counter-culture was palpable, and Nixon produced a north-south "silent majority" with a lock on the electoral map that has made it impossible for a northern Democrat to become president. (The last was John Kennedy in 1960.)

This "positive polarization," as Phillips called it, guaranteed that politics would be an ugly business in the years ahead, fitting perfectly into the

cultural and economic sorting and dividing that had begun to accelerate in the '70s. By the turn of the 21st century, the country "was separating in every conceivable way," Bishop writes in "The Big Sort."

The two parties turned extreme and rarely found common ground. Broad-based civic groups and churches gave way to smaller and narrowly focused sub-groups. Consensus journalism disintegrated into an array of media choices making it easy for people to inhabit their own political, musical, religious and geographic worlds.

The sorting was geographic in a literal sense. When people moved, as Americans often do, they moved into like-minded communities for reasons of lifestyle and identity as much as economics.

"We have built a country where everyone can choose the neighbors most compatible with his or her lifestyle and beliefs. And we are living with the consequences of this segregation," Bishop writes in his book, noting that the number of U.S. counties recording landslide presidential votes for one party or the other doubled from 25 percent to 50 percent from 1976 to 2004.

"Pockets of like-minded citizens ... have become so ideologically inbred that we don't know, can't understand, and can barely conceive of 'those people' who live just a few miles away."

The New York Times review of "The Big Sort" cites a comment by playwright Arthur Miller during the 2004 campaign: "How can the polls be neck and neck when I don't know one Bush supporter?"

But Miller doesn't hang out at Wal-Mart and probably hasn't a clue about the extent to which the Sun Belt's populist sensibilities have come to dominate. In some sense, the South did win the Civil War, or so it has seemed for the last 40 years. Any presidential candidate who shows the slightest hint of northern elitism (Michael Dukakis' ridiculous tank ride, John Kerry's wind-surfing escapade, etc.) has no chance.

A key boost for Republicans has been their talent, in the midst of a segmented society, to frame the American story. Patriotism, low taxes, family values, and fear of immigrants, terrorists and big government

– those kinds of hot-button issues are easier to sell in a splintered marketplace where people lack the time or inclination to seek out detailed information on the wonky Democratic plans to fix health care, Social Security, the environment and so on.

But Packer, in his New Yorker essay, says that's changing. Using the angers, anxieties and resentments of the '60s doesn't work. Ads portraying Obama as a limousine liberal are, says Packer, "spasms of nerve endings in an organism that's brain-dead. Among Republicans, there is no energy, no fresh thinking, no ability to capture the concerns and feelings of millions of people." As evidence he points to recent Democratic victories in special elections in three heretofore solidly Republican congressional districts – in Illinois, Mississippi and Louisiana.

Former House Speaker Newt Gingrich has warned Republicans that "culture war" politics won't work. "The conservative idea factory is not producing as it did," he said. "You hear it from everybody, but nobody agrees what to do about it."

One problem, Packer says, is that while the GOP has been great at winning presidential elections it hasn't been great at governing. Now, the mess in the economy, the war, energy and health care, have mounted to such a size that usual Republican remedies – lower taxes and family values – seem inadequate and implausible.

The finish line is months away, however. Listening lately to McCain you can hear the party working at a new version. Whoever wins in November, there will be change, McCain tells his audiences. The question is what kind of change. Obama brings old solutions from the '60s and '70s, McCain says, adding that he's the candidate who will keep the country safe.

It's the same old message, dredging up the anxieties of the '60s and the fear of outsiders. Maybe it will work again. Or maybe a new kind of candidate will find a new way to assemble the disparate American segments. Mass culture has fallen on the floor and broken into a million pieces. Putting it all together to win an election is a formidable challenge.

THE DAILY GLEAN

# McGruff the crime dog growls at Minneapolis police chief

By DAVID BRAUER

The Strib's David Chanen says the Dakota County Attorney is reviewing possible charges against Minneapolis Police Chief Tim Dolan, but one is weird. Dolan apparently boarded his pooch at a police kennel for a week — a possible ethics violation. Dolan says others did it, but sounds contrite, and has since donated \$200 to the city. Subordinates turned him in. Dolan is also being investigated for improperly disclosing employment information about a black officer now suing the city.

At least Dolan and pooch can drown sorrows at a sidewalk café. Minneapolis has initially approved species-sharing rules, the Strib's Steve Brandt reports. About 50 of the city's 200 outdoor dining spots are expected to sign up. Dogs must be kept from table items (good luck), employees can't handle them, and water dishes are mandatory. Poop must be cleaned — and sanitized! — immediately, and you must tip an extra 10 percent for sanitization. (OK, I made that last part up.)

The Strib's Pat Doyle reports that a Warroad pastor is openly challenging IRS rules prohibiting political endorsements from the pulpit. The Rev. Gus Booth, a Republican National Convention delegate, has urged parishioners not to vote for Barack Obama or Hillary Rodham Clinton, then alerted church-state separation activists. The IRS says endorsements cancel a church's nonprofit tax status, which is a privilege, not a right. It hasn't begun investigating this case.

The Strib's Dee DePass says Ford has called St. Paul union officials to Detroit for a Friday talk about their plant's future. It's part of a nationwide meeting in the face of high fuel prices. There's some hope Ford might convert some truck plants to cars. No one knows if a big announcement — for good or ill — is imminent.

Suddenly, the U is all smiles

about Washington Avenue light-rail, according to the Strib's Jim Foti. U Prez Robert Bruininks reports "enormous progress," including who pays for mitigating traffic and building retrofitting. No details on how kumbaya was achieved, but Bruininks will recommend U regents approve the route today or Friday, which helps meet a September funding-application deadline.

More LRT: the PiPress's Dave Orrick says Minneapolis Mayor R.T. Rybak is bummed about "remarkably underwhelming" Central Corridor light-rail stations. The story features a neat visualization of driving down a reconfigured University Avenue — a zig-zaggy single traffic lane that made me think of bumper cars.

KSTP says U.S. Transportation Secretary Mary Peters will be in town today for a "major funding announcement" on 35W congestion. The feds already awarded \$133 million to the locals for things like bus rapid transit and high-occupancy vehicle lanes, so we'll have to see if this is anything more than a grip-and-grin for Gov. Tim Pawlenty.

The PiPress's David Hanners slaps the outrage vein with a look at who still buys Hummers. Curiously, the first guy interviewed doesn't want to give his name. That's not very macho!

The Pioneer Press reports that a former Liberian prison guard testified about a "savage and unceremonious" mass execution before a Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearing in St. Paul. The details make for tough reading. Minnesota has a large community of Liberian émigrés, which is why that country sent truth squadders here.

A Lyon County judge has moved alleged bus-crash van driver Olga Franco's trial to Willmar, the Strib's Pam Louwagie reports. Franco is the undocumented worker accused of killing four teens and

injuring many others. The PiPress's John Brewer adds that the judge ruled media coverage was fair, and locals unbiased, but it would be hard to find someone untouched by the tragedy in the small, close-knit community.

Via a neighborhood email list, Minnesota Independent's Paul Schmelzer reports Minneapolis cops are criticizing a Fox9 report about a "home invasion" spree. There was a rash of burglaries, but no one was home, which is what you need for an invasion. Plus, suspects weren't "on the loose"; they were caught in 90 minutes. Also, the burglaries didn't happen solely in the Bryn Mawr neighborhood, as the station said. No response from Fox9.

Not too far away, DFL state Rep. Willie Dominguez was robbed outside his north Minneapolis home, at gunpoint. First time in his 24 years there that's ever happened, Dominguez tells the Strib's Terry Collins.

Ugh: Someone in a passing SUV fired on a Minneapolis biker ... with a paintball. KSTP says Jael O'Hare was lucky to escape with only a tender ear. She got the license plate number, but the suspects are still at large. Cops think this might be the first such local attack.

Realtors are happy that the huge home listings inventory has dropped for the first time since 2004, the Strib's Jim Buchta reports. May inventory was below a year ago, indicating a balancing market. But the PiPress's Jennifer Bjorhus notes May-to-May prices are still plummeting: down 13 percent in Ramsey County, 12 percent in Washington County and 11 percent in Anoka County.

The PiPress's Rubén Rosario checks in with a column lamenting state public defender cuts. Even Ramsey County's top prosecutor, Susan Gaertner, is concerned, and says she speaks for other county attorneys. Rosario bitterly notes

25 percent reductions in some defender offices but "I have not heard of one Minnesota prosecutor or a sitting judge being laid off because of budget woes."

In the suddenly interesting world of grain prices, the PiPress's Tom Webb says corn prices topped \$7 a bushel for the first time. Bad weather hasn't helped.

Finance & Commerce reports that the popular local grocery delivery service SimonDelivers has laid off 6 percent of its workforce. Is it the economic slowdown? High fuel prices? The company won't say. One expert says high fuel prices haven't hurt deliverers nationally, but that's apparently not the case here. Meanwhile, the Strib's Jackie Crosby says "hybrid" groceries with huge meat and organic-produce sections are on the rise.

The Strib's Paul Levy says Vikings officials toured the Star Tribune site yesterday; one of four or five groups that have kicked the tires on the for-sale land. Publisher Chris Harte says, "We haven't received an acceptable offer." Curiously, I couldn't find this story on the Strib's website.

I'll admit to being a friend of the subject, but MPR's Euan Kerr offers a great report on painter Scott Anderson, who's documenting the 35W Bridge rebuild in 90-minute portraits. The work is beautiful — click through for the slide show — a neat way to document vistas swallowed up each day by the galloping construction. Anderson, a "plein air" (open air) painter, battles 25 mph winds and the occasional yahoo.

Nort spews: Twins win! The bats come alive as Minnesota tops Cleveland 8-5. Here's the first Sore Loser in what feels like a month. The Cleveland Plain Dealer also profiles Joe Mauer.

COMMUNITY VOICES

## Sex and taxes: a musing on relationships and correlations

By CHARLIE QUIMBY

“Let’s say you and your spouse haven’t had sex in so long that you can’t remember the last time you did. Not the day. Not the month. Maybe not even the season. Would you look for gratification elsewhere? Would you file for divorce? Or would you turn to your mate and say, ‘Honey, you know, I’ve been thinking. Why don’t we do it for the next 365 days in a row?’ “

Naturally, when I read this New York Times story over the weekend, my mind drifted immediately to ... taxes.

Work with me here.

“‘There’s a strong relationship between rating your marriage as happy and frequency of intercourse,’ “ said Tom W. Smith, who conducted the ‘American Sexual Behavior’ study. “What we can’t tell you is what the causal relationship is between the two. We don’t know whether people who are happy in their marriage have sex more, or whether people who have sex more become happy in their marriages, or a combination of those two.’ “

### Which comes first?

OK, maybe tax policy isn’t the first thing that springs to

mind when you read that paragraph. But the researchers’ conundrum — which comes first, sex or happiness? — mirrors the difficulty establishing whether more public investment helps grow prosperity or whether a prosperous state is more disposed to public investment.

Jeff Van Wychen, who wrote the recent Minnesota 2020 study on declining public investment in Minnesota, comes close to saying “no new taxes” leads to unhappiness.

Simply because deterioration in Minnesota’s economic performance relative to other states has corresponded with a relative decline in public investment does not prove that one caused the other. However, predictions from proponents of the “no new tax” agenda that shrinking the size of government would boost Minnesota’s economic performance have certainly not come to pass. In fact, the opposite has occurred.

Conservative economist King Banaian still thinks Van Wychen is reaching.

### Trends and correlations

The organization of the report is to draw two trends and then claim a correlation. The first trend is the decline in government expenditures as a share

of economic activity in the state — 20 pages of that stuff, either as a share of population or share of income. The second trend is a set of measures of economic activity, poverty, education, etc. (even “percentage of deficient bridges” — that’s a new metric!) that are meant to show that Minnesota is slipping relative to other states.

Now “relative to other states” is important.

Banaian goes on to say differing growth rates for rich and poor states complicate the correlation. He doesn’t explain why 140 years of low taxes in poorer southern states would only now start showing Minnesota in a bad light, so I’m not sure growth rates account for the state’s apparent slippage.

Typical. One side tries to make taxes to conform to their fantasies, and then someone else points out their shortcomings. Do sex researchers know something the economists don’t?

“Charla Muller and Annie Brown both talk about how mandated physical intimacy created more emotional intimacy. ‘It required a daily kindness and forgiveness, and not being cranky or snarky, that I don’t think either of us had experienced before,’ Charla said.

“Annie said that she and her husband reached a place in their relationship that they have seldom approached since. ‘It was just this intense closeness,’ she said. “We were so aware of wherever the other person was mentally and emotionally and physically.”

If I see sex and taxes as purely transactional, then I am more likely to define what’s “good” by whether “I got mine.” But if I see them as being an expression of a committed relationship with other people, I am likely to look for ways to “make it good for you, too.”

I can just hear someone saying, taxation doesn’t encourage greater community intimacy — it’s just a legalized form of fiscal rape. The sex and taxes analogy has its limits, but I think there’s a principle worth exploring in there somewhere.

Maybe if I did some research ...

*Charlie Quimby writes the Across the Great Divide blog, where this piece originally appeared. He is also a communications fellow with the Growth & Justice think tank, where he researches and writes about taxation and other public-policy issues.*

**But the researchers’ conundrum — which comes first, sex or happiness? — mirrors the difficulty establishing whether more public investment helps grow prosperity or whether a prosperous state is more disposed to public investment.**

### 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).