



By JUDE MACEREN, Corbis

## Minnesota-Germany 'connection' providing healthy exchange of ideas

Since 2005, a German delegation has been coming to Minnesota every year to share best practices on health care. The exchange of ideas has been mutual, but because of America's cumbersome system, putting most of the ideas into practice has fallen to Germany.

By ANN ALQUIST

BERLIN, GERMANY -- Minnesota is exporting more than corn and medical devices these days. It's also exporting ideas, particularly innovative health care systems to Germany.

A 32-member delegation of German officials and health-care industry leaders recently returned from this year's Minnesota session, which focused on health care access for all. Every year since 2005, German health ministers have returned with new ways to change

the German health-care system.

"It's a sort of job sharing," says Ulrich Dietz, the head of pharmaceutical reimbursement for Germany's Health Ministry. It's a job sharing promoted by the German Academic Exchange Service

With the American military presence in Germany shrinking after the nation's 1990 unification, the nation is intent on continuing its special relationship with the United States, a large market generally regarded here as an engine of innovation.

### U of M connection a key

The University of Minnesota is one of five schools to found a Center for German and European Studies <http://www.cges.umn.edu/> in 1998 (the others are Harvard, Brandeis, Georgetown and UC Berkeley). Why Minnesota should have won such a competitive grant in such heady company is clear to the center's director, Dr. Sabine Engel.

"In the field of health care, we all think of Medtronic, managed care, the nonprofit

mandate of health insurers, and the fact that nationally Minnesota leads -- it has the lowest percentage of uninsured," she says.

"You take all that, and it spells a very clear message: Minnesotans are curious, and we like to learn from others . . . to benefit ourselves as a community."

The German government thinks it has been benefitting as well. Even before the conferences started in 2005, the administration had turned its attention to health-care management systems being developed in the United States.

So, in 2002, when Dietz was impressed by a health-care transparency system known as DRG (Diagnosis Related Groups), he went back to his bosses here. Every hospital in Germany now uses the system to group procedures by cost. The goal is to make the cost of every procedure the same, and Dietz says it's working.

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## MINNPOST.WORLD

## Magna Carta at center of controversies on two sides of Atlantic

By SHARON SCHMICKLE

CAMBRIDGE, England — President Bush's European tour took him to London yesterday — June 15, which is the day Britain celebrates the anniversary of the Magna Carta.

Last week was a busy one on both sides of the Atlantic for the legacy of the 793-year-old document that is revered as the foundation for justice in the English-speaking world.

Back in 1215, the barons revolted against King John's rule. On June 15, his great seal was attached to the barons' list of demands. The treaty was remarkable in that it was the first time subjects had managed to limit the power of their ruler.

For the most part, it is the spirit of that profound turnabout in power we honor today.

### The right to challenge detention

Little survives in actual law from the original document with one notable exception: the right to habeas corpus. If King John's royal sheriffs threw someone in prison, the arrestee was supposed to have the right to appear in court and challenge the detention.

Poet Rudyard Kipling put it this way: No freeman shall be fined or bound,/Or dispossessed of freehold ground,/Except by lawful judgment found/And passed upon him by his peers.

Now, in this age of terrorism and security fears, Bush and British Prime Minister Gordon Brown both are dealing with their own habeas corpus headaches. Their issues differ in significant details. But the underlying principle is the same.

Brown's crisis erupted last week when he pushed through the House of Commons a bill that would give police the power to hold and question terrorism suspects in exceptionally threatening cases for as long as 42 days before having to charge or release them. The current limit is 28 days, up from 7 days in 2000.

Brown and his allies argued that investigations of terrorism are immensely complicated. Investigators need time to sort through huge amounts of encrypted material from computers, foreign connections, multiple languages and suspects with multiple identities.

Police backed the bill, as did a majority of the public.

### 'Grubby bazaar'

But the opposition was intense. Not only civil-rights groups but also members of Brown's own Labour Party argued it would betray the spirit of the Magna Carta to hold someone who may be innocent for up to six weeks with no right to challenge the detention in court.

Conservatives had no intention of helping Brown dodge the heat of the controversy. His leadership already was in grave trouble. Tory leader David Cameron had pulled ahead of Brown in the polls and was seen by many as likely to become prime minister in 2010, the Economist reported.

Already trusted as tough on terrorism, Cameron dismissed Brown's bill, saying, "Terrorists want to destroy our liberties. When we trash our liberties, we do their job for them."

After the bill passed by a razor thin margin, critics accused Brown of cutting back-room deals for votes. Even members of his own party said he had traded civil liberties in a "grubby bazaar," the Guardian reported. Brown denied buying votes, but that didn't end accusations that rose to the level of scandal in the British press.

### Protect Magna Carta

Scandal gave way to shock the next day when a prominent Conservative, David Davis, resigned his seat in Parliament because of the vote.

"For centuries we defended the freedom of people . . . up until yesterday," Davis said in his resignation statement, published

in the Independent.

"This Sunday is the anniversary of Magna Carta, a document that guarantees the fundamental element of British freedom, habeas corpus," Davis continued. "But yesterday this house allowed the state to lock up potentially innocent citizens for up to six weeks without charge."

Davis predicted the House of Lords will reject the bill in order to "protect Magna Carta." Still, Brown could use powers he holds to overrule the Lords, Davis said.

### Forced a special election

So Davis used his resignation to force a special election in his Northeastern England district. He will run, he said, and use his campaign as a platform for debating what he called "one of the most fundamental issues of our day."

The Economist noted that a good share of Conservative Party politics is at play in Davis' bold move. It surprised Cameron, the conservative leader, and thrust Davis ahead of him in the spotlight.

For his part, Brown called it a "stunt that has become a farce."

### Six years v. six weeks

The habeas issue that won't go away for Bush involves 270 detainees at the U.S. lockup at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Six years ago, the Bush administration aimed to find a way around the legacy of the Magna Carta in the cases of foreigners deemed to be enemy combatants. The Guantanamo facility was to be a legal black hole where foreign terror suspects could be held with no right to appear in civilian courts.

Three times now the U.S. Supreme Court has said no, most recently last week when it said the detainees have the right to challenge their detention before federal judges.

Six years at Guantanamo without a right as basic as habeas corpus may seem enormous compared to the proposed six-

week detention the British are roaring about.

Straightforward comparisons are not apt, though. Unlike the foreigners who were seized overseas then locked up at Guantanamo, terror suspects arrested in the United States can be held for just a few days without being charged or let go. There are other significant differences.

### A test for U.S. judicial system

But now that the Guantanamo detainees have habeas rights, the American system is poised to test its ability to honor the spirit of the Magna Carta while also securing itself against dangerous terrorists.

"Habeas corpus has been grandly re-established at Guantanamo," Benjamin Wittes of the Brookings Institution wrote in an opinion piece for the Washington Post.

But that does not mean the government is holding a single person illegally at the base. And it does not give any detainee automatic freedom.

"The result is that 6½ years after the Sept. 11 attacks, America still faces many of the fundamental questions about detentions that it faced the day the military brought its first captives to Cuba," he said.

"Congress, in short, needs to design a system open enough for the public to know how scary some detainees really are and adversarial enough to credibly separate the wheat from the chaff."

Meanwhile, Bush has an option Brown wouldn't welcome at this point. At year's end, Bush can walk away from the ancient burden of the Magna Carta and leave its modern-day challenges for the next administration.

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

## Before you wade into chilly Lake Superior...



**MARK NEUZIL**

How safe is it to swim in the cold and clear waters of Lake Superior? It depends on where you take the plunge.

Last week, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency officials recommended no water contact at the Park Point New Duluth Boat Club/14th Street Beach in Duluth after *E. coli* was found there. The week before, an advisory was issued for Duluth's Southworth Marsh Beach because of elevated levels of *E. coli*.

More than three dozen Lake Superior beaches in Minnesota are now monitored for contamination. Swimming advisories for the 14th Street location were issued five times last year, covering 69 days — practically the entire swimming season in Duluth. (The state of Minnesota does not close beaches, but only issues advisories. Cities and counties can close beaches.)

"In general, Lake Superior is very safe," said Heidi Bauman,

the MPCA official in charge of monitoring the beaches in Duluth. "My kids and I swim there — when weather permits, of course."

Data on beaches and beach closings in the Great Lakes and elsewhere are compiled on websites maintained by the MPCA and the federal Environmental Protection Agency. The sites also contain information on current conditions.

### Keeping tabs

In 2007, the EPA reported that 32 percent of monitored beaches around the country were closed or advisories were issued at least once because of contamination or as a precaution. The federal monitoring program began nationally in 1997, expanding to include Minnesota in 2003. The highest number of closings was reported in 2006 and 2007.

Also keeping tabs is the National Resource Defense Council, which crunches the numbers in a different way. Its 2007 report won't be available for a

few weeks, but it reported that in 2006, 14 percent of Superior-Minnesota beaches exceeded national *E. coli* standards in at least one sample.

Nationally, Minnesota was the fifth-worst among the 30 states surveyed. Ohio was the worst offender with 22 percent of its beaches exceeding *E. coli* standards, followed by New York and Indiana at 19 percent, Illinois at 15 percent, and then Minnesota.

In urban areas sampled, Duluth was the cleanest among Cleveland, Toledo, Milwaukee and Chicago.

Three beaches on the harbor side of Park Point in Duluth — 14th street, Southworth and Hearing Island — account for 80 percent of the Minnesota advisory days, Bauman said. The beaches are in an active harbor with a lot of ducks and geese (read: poop) and less cleansing wave action than the main lake, she said. "It just sits there and cooks."

Using *E. coli* samples to justify advisories has become

controversial, especially after recent studies by University of Minnesota-Duluth researchers and others indicated that a certain amount of the bacteria lives naturally on the beach.

"I always tell people not to swim in a metro lake for 24 hours after a good rain," Bauman said. Possible contaminants wash into the lake without filtering through a sewage treatment plant and have not had a chance to break down via sunlight, she said.

Most of the time, federal and state officials can't pinpoint the source of the contamination unless it is from storm water runoff, or less often, sewage leaks or overflows.

*E. coli* can cause gastrointestinal illness — anything from a stomach ache to severe vomiting and diarrhea — and can be dangerous to the very young, the very old, or those who are already ill.

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Joel Kramer, CEO and editor

## Minnesota-Germany 'connection' providing healthy exchange of ideas

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Some Americans may never benefit from these cost-saving ideas – although the DRG programs are used in Medicare – because the American health-care system is regulated by individual states, rather than a federal system.

Stephen Schondelmeyer, a professor of pharmaceutical economics at the University of Minnesota, has met with German health-care experts and ministers since their first trip to the state. The United States, he says, can learn a lot from Germany, and from the 2006 reforms that will provide insurance to every documented person living in Germany by 2009.

“One thing that Germany has working is spreading the risk across the entire population,” he says. “We don’t have universal coverage, and Germany does essentially. In the long run, it holds down the costs at the societal level.” (Today, officials estimate there are 200,000 uninsured individuals in Germany out of a population of 80 million. In Minnesota, the estimate is 350,000 out of a population of more than 5 million.)

Minnesota policymakers are also wrestling with how to make health care more affordable and accessible. Between 1 to 2 percent of small businesses in Minnesota are dropping health insurance coverage per year, according to the state Department of Human Services. Employers in the private and nonprofit sectors increasingly are adjusting their budgets to pay for skyrocketing employee health-care premiums.

But the solution is not a single-payer system, according to Minnesota Human Services Commissioner Cal Ludeman, who chairs Gov. Tim Pawlenty’s Health Cabinet.

“There is more energy for a single-payer system,” he says, but “what does that mean for a system? Does that mean we will guarantee enrollment for everyone in Minnesota Care (the state’s low-income health-care safety net). That would be unaffordable for one state to manage.”

### Social-welfare tradition

And Germany’s health ministers wouldn’t advocate for such a system, either. It’s never had socialized medicine like the National Health Service in Great Britain. But as Germany’s Health Minister Ulla Schmidt noted on a previous visit to Minnesota, Germans, while impressed by some American ideas, still hold their social-welfare tradition sacred.

“The principle,” she told a University of Minnesota audience in 2006, “is that the rich should pay for the poor. The young for the old. The healthy for the sick.”

It doesn’t quite work that way in practice. Because Germany’s public insurers are funded in part on a sliding scale based on income, “it’s really the middle class who pay for the poor,” says Andreas Brandthorst, a health-care policy researcher at the German Parliament. “The rich pay for themselves.”

It’s the cost of health care that keeps German officials coming back to the United States for ideas. Germany is facing a demographic shift: a glut of aging pensioners with fewer, younger taxpayers to pay into the social welfare system. Today the average age of a patient in a German hospital is 60, and climbing. It’s a shift the government has seen coming, and why it continues to look across the Pond to make its own health-care system more cost-effective.

Another reason the United States has appeal to Germany is American companies’ ability to format health-care management systems for a large country. The German government contracted with 3M, the Maplewood-based company, to assemble the DRG system.

There was a bidding process, but it was clear that the project’s enormity meant that 3M was the only company that could make it happen for the right price. (3M just renewed a five-year maintenance contract with the Germans. 3M wouldn’t disclose the contract’s worth, but the company enjoys a 65 percent market share in providing health information systems in Germany and considers it a booming market.)

“We are the European country

that absorbs a lot of American ideas in health care,” says Dietz. “Maybe (that’s) why it wasn’t mentioned in Michael Moore’s film ‘Sicko.’” The film took audiences to Great Britain, Canada and France to debunk American prejudices about government-regulated health care.

Another reason why the controversial filmmaker may not have included Germany is that the nation’s voters, for the most part, have not politically punished politicians who have shepherded health-care reforms. Those changes have opened up the heavily regulated health-care system to market forces and crowned the consumer king of health-care decisions.

The Social Democrat Ulla Schmidt, for instance, is Europe’s longest-serving health minister, a record seven years. She is now working in a Grand Coalition government with the conservative Christian Democrats and appears to be politically secure heading into Germany’s 2009 elections.

But German politicians still face criticism that their health-care system is becoming too “American.” Germans fear the same trend occurring in the United States is coming to their country.

“The difference between rich and poor is increasing,” says Mario Rios-Miranda. A Chilean by birth, his parents, who supported Socialist President Salvador Allende, came to Germany in 1973 after the coup. Social equity is important to him – he runs a community center and lending library named for Allende in the low-income Neukölln neighborhood here.

Neukölln’s residents are experiencing inequity in the health care system – more doctors are leaving the neighborhood in pursuit of privately insured patients, who can be charged more. A common belief that the privately insured receive better treatment was reinforced recently by a study at the University of Cologne that found that those on public insurance had to wait three times as long to see a doctor. About 90 percent of Germans are on public insurance, like Rios-Miranda.

But even for those on private insurance, there is one constant criticism of the United States, regardless of political affiliation or

income level.

“They don’t do enough for health care,” says Andreas Dämon, referring to the American government. A 31-year-old banker in Frankfurt, he’s on private insurance and welcomes the German government’s most recent health-care reforms. He benefits from them: He won’t be penalized if he switches back to public insurance. Previously, it was almost impossible to rotate out of private insurance to a public provider. And the reforms imposed new caps on how much private insurers can charge their clients, a new regulation that is an incentive for Dämon to stay privately insured.

A political debate this year that would require private insurance companies to pay more into the public insurance funds appears to be headed toward gridlock. Even in Germany, where almost everyone agrees that wealth, to some extent, should be redistributed, there are limits to social welfare.

Minnesota experts and officials would like to see U.S. movement on addressing such issues as the uninsured, double-digit increases in health care premiums that companies say hurt attempts to attract qualified workers, and crippling pharmaceutical costs for the elderly.

But so far, the exchange of ideas has been flowing one way.

Schondelmeyer has observed the political and social climate of changes, and lack of changes, in both the American and German health-care systems: “It’s a broader issue that we, the United States, as a society don’t seem to accept some minimal level of providing health care in the country.”

German officials prefer not to judge why American politicians have been unable to make use of pilot projects that Germany is implementing.

“When good ideas and political will meet,” says the German Health Ministry’s Ulrich Dietz, “then you can have success.”

*Ann Alquist, a Twin Cities journalist, has been working in Germany since 2007 as part of the Fulbright Young American Journalist Program.*

## THE DAILY GLEAN

# GOP convention donors clam up about ‘Lobbypalooza’

By DAVID BRAUER

The Minnesota Independent surveys major Republican National Convention donors to what Forbes calls “Lobbypalooza,” but only eight of 53 will tell them how much they gave. Topping the full-disclosure list: Qwest, with \$6 million; Xcel has ponied up \$1.1 million. Shockingly, Northwest Airlines says it can’t disclose its contribution due to “terms of our agreement with the RNC.” Such provisions should be illegal, and donation-disclosure mandatory; this is about influence. One unlikely donor: the lefty-leaning Service Employees International Union.

Via City Pages: Katherine Kersten continues to bash the local Arabic charter school TIZA, this time in the Wall Street Journal. There’s the same innuendo that Tim Pawlenty’s education department ruled no problem: halal cafeteria food; ritual washing, etc. Does she mention that the curriculum was judged completely free of religious influence? No! She also says the ed department ruled TIZA “is breaking the law” — the report actually said the two non-teaching violations could be problems, but didn’t rule definitively.

Seen elsewhere: The Detroit Free Press looks at airport-commission salaries at nine national airports; although MSP ranked sixth in size, our folks finished second in positions with salaries over \$100,000.

Atlanta, the nation’s busiest airport, has seven such execs; we have 49, even though we’re 13th-busiest. Others worth noting: Denver (fifth-busiest, 34 people over \$100K), Philadelphia (10th, nine) and Detroit (11th, 46). Only Dallas — third-ranked, with 100 folks over \$100,000 — beats us out. Something for local reporters to look into.

The Strib’s Susan Feyder says downtown Minneapolis could get another office tower ... for Target. Aren’t they the ones opening up a massive Brooklyn Park campus? The recently sluggish retailer says it has no plans for more space, but its non-HQ City Center leases are up in 2013 and 2015, so they could switch to new digs, and order up a structure in 2009. No other tenant needs enough space to jump-start a tower. A major developer sees rents rising high enough to justify a new building early next decade.

Related: Whole Foods’ downtown Minneapolis project is delayed again, Feyder reports. Construction on the former Downtown Jaguar site was supposed to begin in April; now the developer hopes it’ll get going before year’s end. The project has changed a lot; it was originally a condo tower, now it’s all retail. Developers blame tight credit markets, but the developer denies cancellation plans. Whole Foods says it’s still in.

MPR’s Sea Stachura looks

at inspection intensity on the state’s various bridge-rebuilding projects. Tighter controls have cost taxpayers \$45 million so far, but that’s the price of public reassurance, MnDOT engineers say. On the 35W reconstruction, every aspect is being inspected four times; three by the builders and one by MnDOT.

The Strib’s H.J. Cummins reports on gas-saving attempts by governments and businesses. At City Hall, Minneapolis has two HourCars — shared Priuses — so “the city can own fewer cars.” In a staggeringly smart move, the city locked in gas at \$2.77 a gallon. Everyone is asking cops not to idle when they write tickets. State patrol folks are carpooling to meetings. On the private side, just-in-time manufacturing deliveries are giving way to bulk shipments.

Inner-city Catholic schools find themselves educating more kids who live in poverty or don’t speak English. And guess what. They might need more money to do it. The PiPress’s Paul Tosto quotes one expert saying parochial schools need help more help, including building bridges to parents and using testing data to improve teaching. It costs one St. Paul Catholic school about \$5,500 to educate a kid, but few parents can afford the \$2,900 tuition.

The PiPress’s Jeremy Olson reports on how major Minnesota hospitals are projecting

stroke-treatment expertise statewide. Stroke deaths in Minnesota have dropped 30 percent since 1996, largely because of a tricky-to-administer drug; places like Abbott Northwestern help rural hospitals negotiate the protocols. Methodist has a “telestroke” remote-adviser program; others have a high-speed patient-transportation network. Medicare reimbursement rates are so low that hospitals lose money doing this, but they’re expanding stroke networks anyway.

The PiPress has a charticle on county commissioner pay; Scott, Carver and Washington are at or below 50K; Anoka and Dakota at \$64,000; Ramsey at \$80,000; and Hennepin tops the list at \$93,888. The hook? Ramsey County Commissioners will raise their pay 3 percent to \$82,400 Tuesday.

An Oregon man won the Great American Think Off in New York Mills; he took the position that the nation’s immigration policy is broken and harming America, AP reports. You can read about the winner and his basic case here.

Gross: the top “story” on the Strib’s front page is about James Lileks’ new video blog. Get a room, Strib editors.

Nort spews: Twins lose 4-2 to the Brewers, but take two of three anyway; they get their only day off in a 41-day stretch today.

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## COMMUNITY VOICES

## Lead in venison: Keep risk in perspective

By MARSHALL HELMBERGER

Are those who eat large amounts of venison at risk of lead poisoning? That was the question on the table [last] week as the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) held a conference in Bloomington with natural resource officials from several Midwestern states.

The DNR first raised the concerns about lead after tests on venison donated to food shelves found lead fragments in nearly one out of five packages. Further tests using venison obtained from DNR employees, found lead fragments in a similar percentage of packages tested. Concerns about the impact of lead on those consuming venison has led the DNR to suspend its venison donation program to food shelves, a program that had shown plenty of promise as a means of encouraging hunters to take more deer, while providing quality meat to those in need.

Questions about the safety of deer meat are more than academic to many folks in our area, and that includes me and my family, whose red meat consumption consists mostly of venison. My take on the question is this: We face risks in everything we do. What's important is to keep those risks in perspective. And on the long, long list of things that can kill us, or make us sick, the risk from lead fragments in venison must be well down towards the bottom.

As the DNR has acknowl-

edged, they are unaware of so much as a single case of even mild lead poisoning stemming from consumption of venison. Humans have long existed with lead in their bodies. We all have it within us, and in most cases, it has no detectable effect. In higher concentrations, it can lead to a number of acute and chronic symptoms, including neurological effects, nausea, headaches, and fatigue, but there are a thousand other substances out there that can do the same thing.

### Relative dangers

I don't discount the potential risk, just as I don't discount the potential risk posed from consuming deer infected by chronic wasting disease. But I'm not about to let such remote risks keep me or my family from eating a high quality meat that in many ways is healthier than commercially produced alternatives, like beef.

As always, risk is a relative thing. We've all heard the reports of unsanitary conditions at slaughterhouses, and the outbreaks of real, even fatal, illness from eating contaminated beef. We know that most beef is much higher in saturated fats than a wild food like venison and because most cattle are now raised in close quarters, they are routinely pumped full of antibiotics and other things that most of us probably shouldn't consume. We know that the harmful environmental effects of industrial cattle farming are increasingly significant.

Some scientists have even suggested that undetected prions in commercially-raised beef could be responsible for the rising prevalence of what is most often diagnosed in this country as Alzheimer's disease, but could be evidence of the brain-wasting effects of Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease, which is similar to mad cow disease.

So which represents the greater threat to human health? I know what I'd rather eat — it's venison, hands down. If deer hunters are eating venison rather than industrially produced beef, they're almost certainly better off, regardless of the risks posed by small amounts of lead.

It's much the same issue with fish consumption. For years, the state's Department of Health has put out fish consumption advisories for many lakes in our region due to the presence of mercury. While those advisories are still in effect, the health department recently revised its suggestions and is now recommending more fish consumption, because of the growing data showing the beneficial health effects of many of the other compounds found in fish.

In other words, it appears the health benefits of moderate, regular fish consumption may well outweigh the risks posed by mercury.

### Doing a careful job of processing

If deer hunters should take anything from the revelations about lead, it's to consider

butchering their own deer, or taking it to a commercial processor that they know and can trust to do a careful job. It's only human nature that we'll take greater care when dealing with food we know we'll be consuming. Given the lead concern, I know I'll probably leave a bit more of the meat around the wound than I have in the past.

It's good to be informed about such risks, and if we can reduce those risks by minor changes in our behavior, it just makes sense. I don't subscribe to the mentality of those who fight or dismiss any new information that they don't like, or find inconvenient. We've had way too much of that thinking in American society in recent years, and it's harmful.

Yet we can't go the other extreme, so often exhibited in the media, where every remote risk is turned into the newest scare of the week and the public isn't provided the sense of perspective that is so critical in assessing relative risk. Let's hope the DNR will use a little of that perspective as it decides where to go from here.

*This article appeared in the weekly Timberjay newspapers in Northern Minnesota. It is reprinted with permission.*

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