

Editor's note

Marnie Werner

This year is something of a standout year for Minnesota. The gubernatorial race we have coming up in November is a big one, and it will be hard fought, with numerous significant issues to debate over: the deficit, jobs, health care, education, and did we mention the deficit?

As the slate of candidates narrowed throughout this year, however, we at the Center (and a few other rural observers) noticed one interesting trend: all of the candidates (at present, six) live in the Twin Cities metropolitan area. Some of the candidates live on the edge of the Twin Cities, and some were raised in rural Minnesota but have not lived there for many years. This idea intrigued us here at the Center, and we thought, why not assemble our next issue of the *Rural Minnesota Journal* around this fact? After all, rural Minnesota, like the Twin Cities, is constantly changing and developing. Why not create an *RMJ* that addressed the issues facing the rest of the state and how those may differ from those in the Twin Cities and its suburbs? The resulting idea is this issue, "A Letter to the Next Governor of Minnesota."

As always, we have invited experts from around the state to comment on matters of importance in rural Minnesota. This time, though, the authors are less on the academic side, and are instead mostly leaders of organizations that deal with and look out for rural interests. The Governor and the Legislature hear from these organizations often during legislative sessions, but we wanted to give these folks the chance to put forth their issues in their own words.

For instance, Lee Warne, executive director of the Minnesota Rural Education Association, has contributed a piece looking at the many questions facing education and how they affect schools, students, teachers and administrators in rural parts of the state. Chris Radatz of Minnesota Farm Bureau and Doug Peterson of Minnesota Farmers' Union discuss in their articles what the future holds for agriculture in this state and ways to think about keeping one of Minnesota's major industries strong into the future.

Steve Perkins of Luverne, Minn., is a director of the Minnesota Hospital Association. His piece discusses the impact of hospital closures on rural communities and the many ways that today's health care system works for and against small towns and their health care communities. Jim Miller, executive director of the League of Minnesota Cities, talks about the hazards facing our cities in Greater Minnesota in the form of deficits and drastic budget cuts, but also discusses how the state can help these struggling communities.

King Banaian and Rich MacDonald, professors of economics at St. Cloud State University, discuss the results of their annual survey of businesses in St. Cloud and how that city's economy is indelibly connected with the rural economy around it. Dane Smith, president of the organization Growth & Justice and a long-time political reporter, makes observations on the challenges and opportunities facing rural Minnesota, especially its businesses, and why it's worth the investment.

And finally, Brad Finstad, executive director of the Center for Rural Policy and Development and former state legislator, and yours truly, Marnie Werner, research manager for the Center and former Capitol reporter, discuss the effects of policy created in St. Paul on the rest of the state and the law of unintended consequences.

Throughout the year, the Center for Rural Policy and Development seeks to raise awareness of rural issues through research and outreach, and the Journal is a key piece in this work. We hope giving these leaders the venue to discuss the issues they're passionate about will raise awareness of where rural Minnesota is today, and the possibilities that abound for the future.