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## Hibbing officials launch website ahead of local sales tax vote in November

BY JESSE WHITE  
MESABI TRIBUNE

HIBBING—City officials in Hibbing are hoping a new website dedicated to sharing information about a local sales tax referendum voters will see on their ballots come Nov. 5 will lead to successful passage and, in turn, a way to help finance a new regional safety center they hope to build.

According to Hibbing Marketing & Communications Director Kelly Grinsteiner, the city worked with Rapp Strategies, Inc. (RSI) to develop YourSafetyOurPriority.org, which went online March 25. “The city is committed to transparently sharing information about the November

referendum. We developed the website to be a dedicated resource to house information about the referendum and build public awareness and understanding of the proposed plan,” Grinsteiner said by email last week. “Our goal is to provide voters with the facts and address their questions and concerns so when they see the single question on the Nov. 5th ballot, they can vote with confidence in their decision.”

The city council approved a contract with RSI in October 2023 for \$32,000. The firm is providing professional communications services to the city, assisting in messaging for the local sales tax referendum.

First discussed in January 2023, the

local option sales tax, if approved, would be a half a percent increase and the money raised would go toward construction costs for a proposed \$29.6 million Hibbing Regional Safety Center to house the city’s police, fire and medical emergency services.

In May 2023, the city—which had sought half the project cost via state dollars—was awarded \$10 million as part of the \$2.6 billion infrastructure bill passed in the final hours of the 2023 legislative session.

According to information on the website, a local half-percent sales tax would help finance up to \$19.6 million over 20 years or until the project is paid for and

the average cost for Hibbing residents would be approximately \$31.06 annually or \$2.59 monthly per person.

The city is also looking at potential grants which, if secured, would lower the overall cost to taxpayers.

Grinsteiner told the Mesabi Tribune last week that the safety center project has been in the works for over three years.

She said a local sales tax spreads the cost of the project among residents and non-residents who purchase goods and services in Hibbing and are served by the city’s public safety departments.

“About half (50.1%) of the \$19.6 million

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### TRUCK FIRE



MARK SAUER

Eveleth and Fayal firefighters block the entrance into Eveleth at Park Avenue to take care of a truck fire just off the highway. A truck hauling shredded paper that apparently caught fire was stopped as the paper was removed by fire fighters and city of Eveleth public works officials.

### Homestead property tax relief proposal draws questions

Iron Range Democrats, Republicans differ on DFL legislative proposal

BY LEE BLOOMQUIST  
FOR MESABI TRIBUNE

Taconite production taxes paid by Iron Range mining companies have been utilized in many ways over the years to benefit northeastern Minnesota communities and residents.

The taconite production tax could again pave the way for another initiative—an increase in the Taconite Homestead Credit to homeowners and farmers within the Taconite Relief Area.

As proposed by Rep. Dave Lislegard, DFL-Aurora and Sen. Grant Hauschild, DFL-Hermantown, eligible homeowners and farmers within the Taconite Relief Area would begin receiving an increase of \$200 per year in the Taconite Homestead Credit portion of their property tax statements.

Lislegard says there’s currently enough money in the Taconite Property Tax Relief Fund to pay for the increase.

“We have confirmed with the Minnesota House of Representatives non-partisan Fiscal Analysts and House Counsel after their consultation with the Minnesota Department of Revenue that there is adequate funds in the

Taconite Property Tax Relief Fund in FY 2025, 2026 and 2027 to increase the Taconite Residential Credit to \$515,” Lislegard said in a text message. “In fact, projections indicate the fund will have a positive balance of \$2 million in FY 2027 even after this increase in benefits to the homeowners on the Iron Range. We were prepared, in case of a shortfall, to place up to 10 cents per taxable ton in the fund. However, that is no longer needed.”

Republican lawmakers on the Iron Range say tax relief is needed on the Iron Range and throughout Minnesota.

But they’re concerned that Taconite Property Tax Relief Fund won’t have enough money to pay for the proposed increase in Taconite Homestead Credit.

“We know that folks on the Iron Range and across the state need tax relief,” Sen. Rob Farnsworth, R-Hibbing, Sen. Justin Eichorn, R-Grand Rapids, Rep. Roger Skraba, R-Ely, Rep. Spencer Igo, R-Wabana Township, and Rep. Ben Davis, R-Merrifield, said in a joint statement. “We all see our property taxes skyrocketing, which leaves less in our family budgets for

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### Dance the night away at Gilbert’s adult prom

BY LINDA TYSSSEN  
MESABI TRIBUNE

GILBERT—A promenade, commonly called a prom, is a dance party for high school students, in semi-formal black tie or informal suit for boys, and evening gowns for girls. Wikipedia, the online encyclopedia, also offers the adult prom, “a social event that is almost perfectly similar to a high school prom in terms of themes and attire, except that some adult proms also serve alcoholic beverages and require those attending to be at least 21 years of age.”

Dancers and listeners are invited to the second annual adult prom

sponsored by the Gilbert 3rd of July committee at the Gilbert VFW annex 8 p.m. to midnight Saturday, April 13. Music by DJ E.Z.C, the Advanced Audio Music Machine, with Jeremy Cap will be featured.

Tickets are \$25 per person and will be available at the door. Light refreshments and snacks are provided. People must be 21 and older to attend. Cash bar available. The prom is a fundraiser for the parade and fireworks.

Wikipedia information says, “A form of adult prom is the ‘second chance prom,’ a gathering of people who either did not go to prom, wanted to

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SUBMITTED/

Pictured at the 2023 prom sponsored the Gilbert 3rd of July parade committee are members, from left, Monique Sandquist, April Slavich, Mike Bradach, Linda Currie and Kim Bradach.

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# Landfill redevelopment project wins brownfield award

HIBBING—The new Eye Clinic North is now an award-winning location. Eye Clinic North was one of 10 nominees in Minnesota Brownfields' annual ReScape awards. On behalf of the project, Mayor Peter Hyduke and Community Development Director Besty Olivanti attended the annual ReScape Gala on Thursday in Minneapolis and brought home the award for Community Impact in the small business division.

"We are honored for our project to receive this award that recognizes the multi-agency collaboration that enabled the economic development of our eye clinic," said Drs. Matt and Hannah Sipola, owners of the thriving optometry practice. "This project would have never happened without the support, hard work and funding from many entities. We are grateful our business is supported by our City and our State."

Eye Clinic North moved from the 2000 block of First Ave. to its new clinic at 1311 E. 34th St. on Aug. 25. Sitting on a 1.4-acre lot, the 4,000 square foot clinic features 7 exam rooms, support spaces and a large optical suite supporting two existing optometrists and providing space for future doctors.

Award nominees were chosen because they demonstrate innovation, collaboration and exemplary results in revitalizing formerly contaminated land, according to Minnesota Brownfields. This work boosts the economy, improves the environment and revitalizes communities. The Eye Clinic North project was nominated by Braun Intertec and Ted Hubbes.

"This project was a huge success for the owners and the City of Hibbing," said



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City of Hibbing Community Development Director Betsy Olivanti and Mayor Pete Hyduke, both in center, pause for a photo after accepting the award for Community Impact in the small business division on behalf of the Eye Clinic North project during Minnesota Brownfields' annual ReScape awards Thursday in Minneapolis.

Hyduke while accepting the award. "We are grateful to receive this recognition."

The project site had been abandoned, underutilized for many years after being used as a city dump in the 1940s through the 1960s. After that, the site had been used as a paved parking lot for surrounding businesses.

The past use of the site as a city dump left behind buried waste materials and contaminated soil in an unlined and unpermitted landfill. Contaminants found on-site were diesel range organics, PAH's, lead and arsenic.

Methane exposure posed a risk to building occupants. Approximately 4,500 cubic yards of material consisting of landfill wastes mixed with contaminated soils were disposed of off-site.

Construction of the new building required the design and construction of

a soil vapor mitigation system as well as post-construction diagnostic testing and sampling.

"The site contained very poor soils and, thus, required extensive soil correction, remediation and vapor mitigation which was quite costly for a private project to bear," said Olivanti. "MN DEED, the Department of Iron Range Resources and Rehabilitation, and the Hibbing Economic Development Authority (HEDA) all contributed to this project, to assist the project with clean up."

Additional project partners included Braun Intertec, the Northland Foundation, ECN Holding/Eye Clinic North, Frandsen Bank, Arrowhead Economic Opportunity Agency (AEOA), Widseth (formerly known as Architectural Resources), Hawk Construction, DEED, MPCA

and State Rep. Julie Sandstede. The total project cost was \$3.2 million.

"Projects like this don't happen unless a person leads a coordinated effort to bring it all together," added Hyduke. "Thank you to Betsy as well."

Minnesota Brownfields is a non-profit organization that promotes the efficient cleanup and reuse of contaminated land as a means of generating economic growth and strengthening communities.

Eye Clinic North plays an important role in facilitating the medical needs of the community. Regionally, access to eye care is becoming limited, with five eye doctors leaving the area in recent years. Eye Clinic North is the only 5-day-a-week eye clinic in Hibbing and most days of the week the only clinic that accepts eye urgencies and emergencies.

# 31st Annual Fishing Raffle fundraiser coming

HIBBING—The Hibbing-Chisholm Breakfast Rotary Club will be hosting its 31st annual Fishing Raffle Fundraiser on Thursday, May 2nd, 2024, at the Nation Guard Armory in Hibbing. This year, the \$10 entry ticket (for adults) and \$5 (for children 12 and under) will provide a rigatoni and meatball dinner, salad, bread, and dessert, plus enter each ticketholder in the Door Prize Drawings. Dinner starts at 5:30 p.m., and the raffles begin at 6:00 p.m.

The Door Prizes include a \$700 weekend at Nelson Resort on Crane Lake (two nights and three days), an adult fishing package, a \$250 Mike Lesch custom-made rod, and cash prizes of \$300, \$200, and \$100. The

children's door prizes will include a \$150 fishing package and a \$150 Mike Lesch custom-made rod. All children will receive a gift bag of prizes. You do not have to be present to win the Door Prizes.

There will be basket raffles, fishing, summer sports equipment, and meat raffles.

You can pick up your tickets from any Hibbing-Chisholm Breakfast Club Rotarian, at the door on May 2nd, or by calling 218-929-9280. Proceeds from the Fish Raffle fundraiser will be used to send a student from our schools to RYLA (Rotary Youth Leadership Award) camp this summer and support more than a dozen youth and community organizations.

# AARP smart driver offering refresher course

VIRGINIA—AARP Smart Driver will be offering a 4 hour refresher course for those who want to renew their certificate. Minnesotans age 55 and over are entitled to a discount on their automobile insurance if they attend this course. There is no test. The course is based on dealing with changes that affect our driving. This would include changes in ourselves, our medications, vehicles, roadways and laws. The next Smart Driving course

will be held on April 22, 2024 at Gethsemane Lutheran Church 901 4th St. S. Virginia in the fellowship hall. The course will start at 9:00 AM. This is being taught by retired Chief of Police Dana Waldron. The cost is \$20.00 for AARP members and \$25.00 for non-members. To register for the class call 218 780 7446 or send an email to dana.w319@gmail.com and please provide you name and phone number.

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## TAX

From Page A1

local sales tax collected for the public safety center would be paid by non-residents according to the University of Minnesota. If the projects were funded through a property tax increase, the cost burden would fall solely on homeowners, renters and commercial property owners in Hibbing,” Grinsteiner said. “If the sales tax is approved by voters this November, Hibbing residents would be responsible for less than one-third of the total project cost when factoring in the state bonding funds and non-resident contributions.”

Since launching the website last week, the number one question asked has been where the proposed regional public safety center will be located.

That hasn't been determined yet, Grinsteiner said, but the city has a construction manager and the council voted last week to request proposals for an architect.

Once an architect is chosen, next steps would

include identifying a location and proceeding with a preliminary design, she said, adding that updates on the project will be posted on the website as it progresses.

When the website was launched on March 25 there was a high volume of views and the number has fluctuated since, Grinsteiner said.

“It has more than 2,000 pageviews and upwards of 750 unique visitors. The average time spent on each page is 80 seconds. The top source for visits currently is Facebook, as many people are following the links in our social media posts. We anticipate traffic to increase as we continue to post updates the project and share information throughout the community,” she said. “One of the features of the website we truly like is the Connect page, where people can send us a direct email message with their questions, feedback or concerns. This will allow us to have more conversations with the public and tailor the information on the website that is more important to voters.”

City officials are trying

to reach every voter they can heading into November, Grinsteiner said, and in addition to the website, they will also be utilizing social media, city communication channels, having meetings with community groups, attending events and more to help get the information about the referendum out to the public.

“We want to hear their questions, feedback and concerns, as this is their regional public safety center and the future of their public safety services. We look forward to hosting open houses and informational meetings, sharing videos, presenting to various civic groups and organizations, and more,” Grinsteiner said. “We will also be inviting the public to visit the Hibbing Fire Hall at some point to see the deteriorating state of the facility first-hand. We are open to other ideas as well, so we encourage the public to reach out through the connect form on YourSafetyOurPriority.org.”

She added that the site will be updated with new information and resources from now through Election Day.

## PROM

From Page A1

relive prom, or whose high school prom did not work out the way they had hoped.”

More information from Wikipedia: “The origin of adult prom is unclear, though two events which occurred in the 1990s are likely to have inspired the concept. Drew Barrymore stated in a 1990s interview on ‘Late Night with Conan

O'Brien’ that she threw a prom party for herself and a few friends who never got to go to prom. The Class of 1956 from Tenafly, New Jersey, whose prom was canceled at the time, held their own prom for their 35-year reunion in 1991.”

## TRUCK FIRE



MARK SAUER

Eveleth and Fayal firefighters block the entrance into Eveleth at Park Avenue to take care of a truck fire just off the highway. A truck hauling shredded paper that apparently caught fire was stopped as the paper was removed by fire fighters and city of Eveleth public works officials.

## Two tribal nations sue social media companies over Native youth suicides

BY GRAHAM LEE BREWER, HALELUYA HADERO AND SHAWN CHEN  
Associated Press

Two tribal nations are accusing social media companies of contributing to the disproportionately high rates of suicide among Native American youth.

Their lawsuit filed Tuesday in Los Angeles county court names Facebook and Instagram's parent company Meta Platforms; Snapchat's Snap Inc.; TikTok parent company ByteDance; and Alphabet, which owns YouTube and Google, as defendants.

Virtually all U.S. teenagers use social media, and roughly one in six describe their use as “almost constant,” according to the Pew Research Center.

But Native youth are particularly vulnerable to these companies' addictive “profit-driven design choices,” given historic teen suicide rates and mental health issues across Indian Country, chairperson Lonna Jackson-Street of the Spirit Lake Tribe in North Dakota said in a press release.

“Enough is enough. Endless scrolling is rewiring our teenagers' brains,” added Gena Kakkak, chairwoman of the Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin. “We are demanding these social media corporations take responsibility for

intentionally creating dangerous features that ramp up the compulsive use of social media by the youth on our Reservation.”

### SOCIAL MEDIA COMPANIES ACCUSED OF ‘DELIBERATE MISCONDUCT’

Their lawsuit describes “a sophisticated and intentional effort that has caused a continuing, substantial, and longterm burden to the Tribe and its members,” leaving scarce resources for education, cultural preservation and other social programs.

A growing number of similar lawsuits are being pursued by US school districts, states, cities and other entities, claiming that TikTok, Snapchat, Instagram and YouTube exploit children and adolescents with features that keep them constantly scrolling and checking their accounts.

New York City, its schools and public hospital system accuse the platforms of fueling a childhood mental health crisis that's disrupting learning and draining resources. School boards in Ontario, Canada, claim teachers are struggling because platforms designed for compulsive use “have rewired the way children think, behave, and learn.”

The Associated Press

reached out to the companies for comment. Google said “the allegations in these complaints are simply not true.”

“Providing young people with a safer, healthier experience has always been core to our work,” Google spokesperson José Castañeda said in a statement. “In collaboration with youth, mental health and parenting experts, we built services and policies to provide young people with age-appropriate experiences, and parents with robust controls.”

Snap Inc. said it provides an alternative to a feed of online content. “We will always have more work to do, and will continue to work to make Snapchat a platform that helps close friends feel connected, happy and prepared as they face the many challenges of adolescence,” the company's statement said.

### NATIVE CHILDREN ARE UNIQUELY STRESSED OUT

Native Americans experience higher rates of suicide than any other racial demographic in the U.S., according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, jumping nearly 20% from 2015 to 2020 compared with a less-than 1% increase among the overall U.S. population.

## RELIEF

From Page A1

things like food and gas. Last year, Democrats had a \$19 billion opportunity to provide real tax relief. Instead they spent it and raised taxes an additional \$10 billion. While well intentioned, this bill was drafted with some problems. The property tax relief fund doesn't have the funds to cover this proposal in its current form, and would require a shift to funding from the Douglas J. Johnson Fund as a stopgap if the math doesn't add up, which it doesn't. A more deliberate approach that included the entire Iron Range delegation would have been more productive in avoiding these problems.”

Iron Range area Republicans said they last year sought tax relief in a number of areas, but were overruled by Democratic Farmer-Labor majorities.

“Last year, we voted for more than \$12 billion in tax cuts to seniors' social security, property taxes, parents, income taxes for the lowest-wage earners and significant one-time rebates because people need real relief, not election year gimmicks,” they said. “There is a way to provide property tax relief, but it needs more serious and bipartisan work.”

A portion of the Taconite Production Tax paid each year by Iron Range mining companies goes into the Taconite Property Tax Relief Fund.

Each year, depending on the level of iron ore pellet production, the amount varies that goes into the fund.

Increasing the credit by \$200 per homeowner would cost the Taconite Property Tax Relief Fund an additional \$3.25 million in fiscal year 2025, according to legislative analysts.

After 2025, the increase would cost about \$7 million more per year,

according to analysts.

After 2027, the Taconite Property Tax Relief Fund would still have a surplus of \$2 million, Lislegard said.

For calendar year 2024, 42.6 cents per ton from the \$3.25.9 per ton production tax goes into the fund.

The fund in recent years has paid out almost as much as what has been deposited into the fund.

As an example, in 2022, \$11.9 million was deposited into the fund and \$11.2 million was paid out, according to the Minnesota Department of Revenue.

In 2021, \$13.1 million went into the fund and \$11.2 million was paid out.

The Taconite Property Tax Relief Fund as of Dec. 31, 2022, had a balance of just over \$9.3 million, according to the Minnesota Department of Revenue.

Hauschild said he and Lislegard planned to request a transfer of an additional 10 cents per ton into the property tax fund, if needed, to cover the increased homestead property tax relief cost. The 10 cents would have come from Iron Range Resources and Rehabilitation funds that also receive money from the production tax.

An escalator which automatically raises the Taconite Production Tax each year unless frozen by the legislature, could also be used if needed to help cover the increased homestead property tax relief funding, Hauschild said.

In the event the increased property tax relief can't be covered by the Taconite Property Tax Relief Fund, the Douglas J. Johnson Economic Protection Trust (DJJ) Fund acts as a backstop.

The DJJ fund, which currently has a balance of about \$211.6 million, also receives a portion of the production tax each year.

The DJJ fund is overseen by the Minnesota Department of Iron Range

Resources and Rehabilitation.

The DJJ fund is designed to support major economic development projects.

In past years, surpluses in the Taconite Property Tax Relief Fund have been tapped for other uses.

In 2003, 2010, 2013, and 2015, the Taconite Property Tax Relief Fund was utilized by the Iron Range Resources and Rehabilitation Board to help fund public works projects along with economic development projects within the agency's 13,000 square-mile service area.

Taconite production taxes have also been utilized for other initiatives such as supporting construction of new schools.

Lislegard's and Hauschild's homestead property tax relief legislation still needs to be approved by the full legislature.

“We are pleased that the people of the Iron Range can directly receive increased benefits from taconite taxes by reducing their property taxes over the long-term if our proposal passes the legislature,” Lislegard said. “The people deserve it as it has not been raised since 1998.”

In 2024, about \$122.6 million in taconite production taxes paid by Iron Range mining companies will be distributed to cities, townships, counties, school districts, Iron Range Resources and Rehabilitation, for property tax relief and into other accounts for use within the Taconite Relief Area of northeastern Minnesota, according to the Minnesota Department of Revenue.

Hauschild said increasing property tax aid to homeowners and farmers is a worthwhile idea.

“They deserve it, it's a pretty cool idea,” Hauschild said. “It hasn't been increased for decades despite property valuations, inflation, etc.”

## Hauschild proposes new replacement aid program for greater Minnesota school districts

ST. PAUL—Senator Grant Hauschild (DFL-Hermantown) presented legislation in the Senate Education Finance Committee Tuesday to provide greater property tax fairness and relief for residents in school districts with heavy concentrations of seasonal or recreational property.

“Too many school districts across our state are struggling to cover basic costs and fund basic services because lower-income residents are asked to pay for school operating levies while million-dollar cabins are not,” said Senator Hauschild. “This bill proposes a better way forward, by creating

a new seasonal and recreation tax base replacement aid program, reducing the burden facing local residents as they consider local operating levies by as much as 50%. This can make a real difference for students and schools across Minnesota.”

Senator Hauschild's proposal, S.F. 4995, creates a new seasonal tax base replacement aid program for school districts where seasonal recreational properties (cabins) make up a large percentage of the property tax base but do not pay school levies. The bill would offset voter-approved operating referendum levies in districts with seasonal recreational

properties and reduce tax rates by as much as 50% in school districts with large amounts of seasonal recreational properties.

The hearing on S.F. 4995 included testimony from Lake Superior School District Superintendent Jay Belcastro, St. Louis County Schools Finance Director Kim Johnson, Industrial Technology teacher from Lake Superior Public Schools Chris Belanger, and Cook County Schools teacher Chad Benesch.

The bipartisan legislation was passed and now moves to the Senate Taxes Committee.

## Democrats pounce on Arizona abortion ruling and say it could help them in November's election

BY JONATHAN J. COOPER  
Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP)—Democrats pounced Tuesday on an Arizona Supreme Court ruling that permits enforcement of an 1864 law effectively banning abortion in the state, blaming former President Donald Trump and Republicans and pressing for political advantage on an issue that could dominate a critical 2024 battleground.

The ruling permits doctors or others to be prosecuted for performing an abortion at any time unless the mother's life is in danger, with no exceptions for rape or incest. President Joe Biden's campaign immediately blamed the ruling on Trump's appointment of three Supreme Court justices who voted to overturn a federally

guaranteed right to an abortion.

“The girls today and the young women do not have the rights that we once did because of Donald Trump,” said Phoenix Mayor Kate Gallego, a Democrat. “Donald Trump is dangerous and reckless.”

The decision will give Arizona the strictest abortion law of the top-tier battleground states heading into November's election. Biden and his allies are emphasizing efforts to restore abortion rights, while Trump has avoided endorsing a national abortion ban and warned that the issue could lead to Republican losses.

In a sign of Republicans' political bind, even Kari Lake, a staunch Trump ally and abortion opponent who is running for Senate in Arizona, said the total abortion ban

“is out of step with Arizonans.” It's a shift from two years ago when Lake praised the 1864 law. Several Republican legislators called for the law to be repealed.

“This issue should be decided by Arizonans, not legislated from the bench,” said U.S. Rep. David Schweikert, an Arizona Republican who previously praised the overturning of Roe v. Wade.

Trump reshaped the U.S. Supreme Court during his presidency, moving the court to the right and paving the way for the Dobbs decision in 2022 that allowed for the enforcement of state laws like Arizona's.

The Arizona ruling comes a day after Trump said abortion limits should be left to the states and declined to endorse a national ban after months of mixed messages.