



## Opportunities in the shutdown

By Mitch LeClair | Wednesday, July 13, 2011

ST. CLOUD, Minn. — Returning from a two-week trip to the East Coast at the beginning of July seemed to spell disaster.

Throughout the last few days of my adventure, Twitter updates and news headlines grew frantic and remained in a panic as the Great Shutdown of 2011 approached and ensued. Yet, despite the doom, I arrived home to St. Cloud in one piece, facing no emergencies along the way.

Perhaps it's my appreciation for evolution blinding me to the horrors just around the corner, but the state government "shutting down" doesn't sound like that bad of an idea. In fact, it appears to me as a perfect opportunity to appreciate the unseen.



(Hear me out: arriving to the liquor store closest to my house this past Saturday at 9:50 p.m. and seeing a "Closed" sign — due to the inability of the store to obtain a liquor license during the government's nap — did affect me immediately and, needless to say, did not make my life better. [Whether or not the state should grant licenses for liquor sales is fodder for another piece. But I digress.] I do also understand the honest, pressing pains of many Minnesotans during the past two weeks. I am commenting, however, and I'm asking for your attention, not your donations, so please focus on my ideas.)

### True source of peace, prosperity

While stalled salaries and postponed programming have real, negative effects — income for employees and their families, businesses connected to park tourism and children eating subsidized summer meals in urban areas, as a few examples — I would like to posture that this state stoppage has afforded area residents with plenty of opportunity to observe the true source of peace and prosperity in our modern Minnesota lives: trade.

By "trade," I mean all the voluntary and cooperative acts that individuals choose throughout their days in the land of many, many lakes. This includes commercial transactions, community groups, volunteer organizations and, perhaps most important, the commonly ignored effects of a developing social order.

Despite their lack of a distinct decisionmaker, common social situations can serve as a model for the multiple fixes Minnesotans need in this time of a puttering government. Nearly-no-state conditions on highways, immigrant restaurants serving natives newfangled cuisine, localized slang and thousands of retail sales: these seemingly normal, mundane happenings — events and facets of our lives that go unmentioned by pundits, solution-providers and the media that cover the many problems that still plague our robust, relatively calm society — could contain answers.

Perhaps we residents of Minnesota could benefit from understanding the words of Adam Ferguson, an 18th-century Scottish philosopher who referred to advancements in human welfare arriving as "the result of human action, but not the execution of any human design."

We must remember that actions always have unintended consequences. In the realm of peaceful human cooperation, voluntary interactions and profit-seeking enterprises, negative unintended consequences tend to result in additional negative consequences on the original actors. Shrinking sales, souring reputations and low attendance at the next meet-up are some examples.

#### **Intentions don't always match results**

Interested observers must also never forget that intentions are not necessarily results. When these fail to match up in the "private sector," checks on future behavior abound. When the words and actions of a politician (or expert or pundit) do not match policies' outcomes, what happens? Brainstorming for more potential solutions, a tougher time at the polls — or perhaps not much of anything.

My suggestion for Minnesotans is to take all this talk of shutdown solutions with a grain of wild rice.

Lasting, sound, agreeable solutions to societal wants and needs (low-income hunger, roads necessary for traveling and transporting goods, access to nature parks, etc.) will arrive as the consequence of people's desire to serve each other through peaceful means, whether charitable or monetarily motivated.

Residents here need no more top-down, state-based fixes, especially when offered to solve top-down, state-based problems. These "answers" remove the incentive to innovate, expel all feedback in the form of prices and are based on the direct use or threat of coercive force. Commission plans and experts' policy suggestions appear heaven-sent on paper, but I urge readers to mentally press on a few more steps and allow abstract ideas — backed by historical evidence — to invade their brains.

#### **Let the new emerge**

But what about the hungry children, the unemployed park workers and the suffering businesses? The solution of "I don't know, let people figure it out," leaves a salty taste in already unquenched July minds, I know. It is necessary, however, for the existence of perhaps the most powerful force in the whole of human history: emergence.

Remove the static institutions and discover adaptation. Let new orders develop. The results will surprise us — or pass by unmentioned. Either way, our lives will have improved.

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