

Why Saint Paul Mayor Randy Kelly must be stopped

Randy Kelly has enjoyed a long and fairly undistinguished political career in Minnesota. According to his webpage, he spent some years treading water in the Minnesota Senate, helping to create a number of bureaucratic trivialities as well as a few meatier and more meaningful achievements, many of them law-and-order related. He evidently served, among other things, as a member of the Senate Crime Prevention Committee and Transportation Committee. His site lauds his achievements in helping develop the state's four-year law-enforcement certification, as well as the Minnesota Gang Strike Force, and brags of his record in reforming Minnesota's criminal-justice system.

This is ironic, because this nominal Democrat, after becoming Mayor of the city of Saint Paul, has repeatedly slashed the public-safety budget, cutting funding - post-September 11th, mind you - to the police and fire departments. Public transportation funding, as well, has gotten cut. In fact, the City of Saint Paul has been facing such economic problems and subsequent years of budget shortfalls that pretty much every branch, department, and division of the city has had budget cuts, including the schools.

As if this weren't troubling enough, this Democrat in name only, taking a page from the current federal administration's playbook, spent the first few months in office appointing unqualified lackeys to positions throughout the city. These people, the mayor, and the President, are the only people yet to benefit from Kelly's (so far) three years in office. All of his constituents, the residents of Saint Paul, have directly or indirectly suffered from the results of Kelly's self-serving incompetence.

Yes, I said the President. Despite being a long-term Democratic (DFL) member, the Mayor, in his all-failing lack of wisdom, endorsed - **campaigned** for - Bush many times in the months preceding the 2004 elections. He claimed to do this for seemingly noble reasons:

"Americans are looking for strong, steady, and principled leadership. They crave politicians who stand for something, rather than rally us against someone. The American people I know - the ones I represent in Saint Paul - care about leaders who stand steady in difficult times - who do not waver - nor bend to the wind - they want strong, determined leadership - and, I believe George Bush provides us that leadership today at this point in our history."

"I've been a Democrat all my life and after this announcement I'll continue to be a Democrat. But I believe I have a higher loyalty to what's best for my country and our city than to party."

This is unmitigated hypocrisy. Admittedly, Kelly never actually claimed to be a leader "who stands steady in difficult times, who does not waver, nor bend in the wind", nor "strong, steady, and principled"; he never actually claimed to himself have "strong, determined leadership", none of which would be true. It's implied, though, and he **does** claim a higher "loyalty" to what's best for the City of Saint Paul, and that's where the problem lies: he doesn't serve the city's interest, nor the country's interest. The only interest Randy Kelly serves is his own, and if he has to betray the trust of his city and his party to do it, he does so unflinchingly and without remorse.

His behavior, his every action, is calculated to create and maintain political capital, wherever and however he can get it. He's made no attempt to disguise his ambitions at running for national office, and in his frequent fundraising and campaigning for Bush, he's clearly and firmly attaching himself to the coattails of this crooked, dishonest, and manipulative administration. That he's had to betray his party doesn't seem to bother him, nor does using underhanded, Rovian tactics to force his agenda - garnering his own political capital - upon the city.

In the summer of 2004, three teenagers died in a manmade cave on the south side of the city, after repeatedly entering the smoke- and carbon monoxide-filled sandstone tunnels. Yes, repeatedly entering; they went in, had difficulty breathing, exited, caught their breath, and went back in, several times, before being overcome by the carbon monoxide. A tragedy, but essentially a case of "death by stupidity", or misadventure, no more or less tragic than the scores of other accidents that occur every year in the city.

Randy Kelly, however, latched onto the event like a starved vulture and refused to let go.

Displaying a complete ignorance of and disregard for the city's history, which he professes pride in, he immediately vowed - as so many have before him - to seal once and for all these "dangerous" "limestone" caves. He was, for a change, good to his word - the day after the tragedy, Public Works crews bulldozed closed all the entrances they could find, as has been done perhaps dozens of times over Saint Paul's history.

That wasn't good enough for King Randy, though. Adopting the motto 'let no minor tragedy be less than fully exploited', he vowed - publicly - to find a permanent solution to the decades-old problem of people getting into these places they shouldn't be. In these troubled times of danger, hardship, and fear, protecting us from ourselves became his new mission and obsession. Milking the opportunity for all it was worth, he committed the city to spend almost one-hundred-thousand dollars to commission an engineering firm to survey the caves and report a solution to the "problem" of their existence. This survey - which created the opportunity for people to once again get into the briefly sealed caves, which they did, required the *reopening* of all the caves that had just been sealed, at the city's expense, so that in addition to the hundred-thousand dollars we couldn't at all afford, the city wound up footing the bill for excavating the base of the bluff they'd just bulldozed over, and then bulldozing it all back up a second time, after the survey. This series of unnecessary expenses, mind you, during a period where the police, fire department, and schools were all dangerously underfunded, and during which gang-related violence, something Kelly once pretended to care about, was on the rise.

A few weeks after the cave accident, a teenaged girl died on the river after an accident in a makeshift raft, and a few days later a teenager playing on the east-side bluffs fell to his death while waiting for Independence Day fireworks. With no obvious way to squeeze political capitol out of these tragedies, with no easy way to make himself look like a good guy, these accidents - no more and no less tragic than the cave one - went unnoticed and unexploited by Mayor Kelly.

In January 2005, after his pathetic and transparent support for Bush thankfully failed to result in the President winning Minnesota, and with the city facing yet another looming budget crisis, the engineering firm released their report. The "recommendation" was, surprise, surprise, exactly what the Mayor wanted to hear - seal and hide the entrances. The pricetag? A true bargain, at a mere one-million dollars. Like his newfound Republican friends, he wasted no opportunity to spread lies and fear to warn of a grossly-exaggerated non-danger: *"Let me assure you that we will do this project, we will do it in 2005 and we will somehow find the resources to get it done. The sheer danger of them requires me to make an urgent and important request to all members of the public: Please stay away."*

Randy Kelly, like so many other politicians, will stop at nothing to get what he wants. He, or more likely a PR firm working for him, has clearly decided that it will improve his image to be seen to be vigilant in protecting the citizens of his fair city. Rather than try to tackle a real problem - rising drug use, increasing levels of gang violence, prostitution - he, with no regard for reality or truth, has fabricated a fake crisis to solve, and is determined - regardless of the cost - to make a token, highly publicized effort at solving it.

It is a token effort, albeit an expensive and flashy one. At the same time that one-million dollars the city can't afford is going to go towards sealing these caves in a fashion, according to the mayor, *"far more aggressive than anything that has been done in the past"*, one prominent and popular cave - the North Star Brewery cave, also known as Montana Bill's Cave - on Saint Paul's east side was ineffectually gated as an attraction in a city park, and a few hundred feet away Carver's Cave - once completely buried and sealed - has been excavated and re-exposed for people to gawk at. In addition, the "aggressive" million-dollar cave hiding is only going to affect perhaps one-half of all the caves on Saint Paul's south side, and doesn't at all affect any of the many caves north of the river. This is a million-dollar band-aid, a token effort to half-assedly solve a problem that doesn't exist so King Kelly can look good in the media and, while squandering taxpayers' money, accumulate political capital for his openly-planned run for national office.

The City of Saint Paul, and it's citizens, cannot afford this self-serving political ploy on Kelly's part. It is important that the City Council not permit Kelly to abuse and

misuse his position of trust and power, not to mention taxpayer's money, in a manner that will benefit nobody but himself. It is an outrage, plain and simple. If you live in Saint Paul, please contact your district's council members, your state representatives, any- and every-one you can, and let them know that Kelly's self-serving ploy cannot be permitted. Corruption and abuse of power may be rampant in the nation's capital, but, damnit all, it's not going to become endemic in our city!

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