



Within the Leather

by David Kazmierczak, CGCS

In March of 2012 I sat down and wrote a column about how

wonderful life was for the snow had melted, the sun was shining and the temperatures were unbelievably above normal. A year and a month later, I and the rest of Minnesota golfdom are in agony and misery as somehow last March decided to show up in April 2013.

However after writing last month's column about the misery of pothole season and at the risk of completely going off the deep end about weather I refuse to let it hijack another column. Rest assured, the warm weather will come eventually and our golf course will be live and vibrant again.

Instead, I will focus this column on another bit of misery that needs to be addressed.

As most of you have heard, the Minnesota Legislature is attempting to pass a water appropriations bill that will re-structure fees paid to the state for the privilege of drawing water out of a lake, river or aquifer. This new fee structure would triple the amount of money paid by

a course to the DNR on average, and in some cases even more. I have some strong opinions on this.

First of all, let's address the word fee. Fee is cute little word commandeered by politicians recently to replace the word tax. For tax is an evil word, that apparently will not allow politicians to be re-elected. Fee seems to be so much easier on the electoral palate. It is used freely on both sides of the political spectrum, not one party or another. Fees have slipped into our business as well. There is the environmental recovery fee we pay to our waste haulers. We pay certain fees when chemicals are delivered to us. We have paid fuel surcharge fees when the price of fuel shot up a few years ago. Let's call it what it is- it's a tax.

So the state feels it needs to charge more for water use. On the surface, that is not an unreasonable request. After all, water is still relatively cheap in our neck of the woods compared to other places in the country. If you browse the bill, the politicians have some grand plans with the funds they are attempting to procure. Some make sense to me, some seem to do nothing more than perpetuate big government. You might want to take a peek at the bill and formulate your own opinion.

My biggest problem with this is that we have been trying to work with the DNR on self-regulation through

our own water conservation project. Then we get almost blind-sided with this proposal, and while it affects many more industries other than just our own, we will feel the impact more than most. That, coupled with the fact that they are not easing into the increase, they are blowing the increase right out through the front door, is upsetting. At the time when budgets are already set, we are being asked to adsorb a couple thousand dollars more, minimum, to the negative on the bottom line.

When this issue was brought to the attention of the MGCSA Board of Directors by Jack MacKenzie and others on the board, the question posed was whether or not to try and fight the bill in some way, if dialogue with the DNR could not bring a sensible resolution. But how? Certainly a request from golf (the MGCSA, MGA, etc.) to be heard could sway some opinions, but it seems clear to me the Dayton administration and the DFL controlled legislature is on a full-fledged cash grab from the tax payers on Minnesota and it is not going to stop anytime soon.

So what can we do? There is the vote, but we all have to wait a while to exercise that option. Shorty after the last MGCSA meeting I jokingly sent out an email that stated that in my club's situation, I figured out that if I was to pass the fee on to our golfers for this brand new legislation it would equate to about 13 cents per round played at

Prestwick. We could charge \$40.13, \$50.13 whatever the going rate would be, and see the reaction of the consumers. We would call it the "DNR" fee. Has a nice ring, doesn't it?

But what a pain in the hind end for the pro shop collecting the 13 cent fee. So I now say we take it a step further. Include all the government taxes and "fees" levied on our business and pass it on down the line. Surely any wise thinking government entity would appreciate this maneuver. They have been doing this for years.

Add up all the money from your maintenance budget paid for licenses (water permits, pesticide, FCC, phosphorus, low-voltage, DOT, etc.) and the cost for the continuing education for them. Add in man hours updating OSHA regulations, MSDS sheets, right to know training, etc. and any other costs for them. Figure out the dollar total and what percentage that is of your budget. Take that figure to the clubhouse and proudly proclaim you have found a way to lower the cost of golf at your golf course. The customer will be charged only \$35 or \$45 for golf, but has to be assessed a \$10 "Governmental Fee."

All we are trying to do is keep golf affordable for our customers, and make everybody happy. If you can't beat em', join em'.