



Pothole Confidential: My Life as Mayor of Minneapolis

R.T. Rybak

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A pajama party at the Minneapolis–St. Paul International Airport inadvertently helped launch R.T. Rybak’s political career (imagine a rumba line one hundred protesters long chanting, “We deserve to sleep, hey!”), but his earliest lessons in leadership occurred during his childhood. Growing up in a middle-class neighborhood, attending private school with students who had much more than he did, spending evenings at his family’s store in an area where people lived with much less, he witnessed firsthand the opportunity and injustice of the city he called home.

In a memoir that is at once a political coming-of-age story and a behind-the-scenes look at the running of a great city, the three-term mayor takes readers into the highs and lows and the daily drama of a life inextricably linked with Minneapolis over the past fifty years. With refreshing candor and insight, Rybak describes his path through journalism, marketing, and community activism that led to his unlikely (to him, at least) primary election—on September 11, 2001. His personal account of the challenges and crises confronting the city over twelve years, including the tragic collapse of the I-35W bridge, the rising scourge of youth violence, and the bruising fight over a ban on gay marriage (with Rybak himself conducting the first such ceremony at City Hall on August 1, 2013), is also an illuminating, often funny depiction of learning the workings of the job, frequently on the fly, while trying to keep up with his most important constituency, his family.

As bracing as the “fresh air” campaign that swept him into office, Rybak’s memoir is that rare document from a politician: one more concerned with the people he served and the issues of his time than with burnishing his own credentials. As such, it reflects what leadership truly looks like.

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