

2012 LEGISLATIVE REPORT

SEN. JEFF HAYDEN • REP. KAREN CLARK • REP. SUSAN ALLEN

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

The Minnesota State Legislature adjourned on May 10, ending the 2011-2012 legislative biennium.

We started this session with our focus held squarely on finding innovative ways to get the 200,000 unemployed and underemployed Minnesotans in good-paying jobs, capable of supporting their families. We believe this to be an essential component in strengthening our community for generations to come.

These past two years should have been focused on the plights of the hard working Minnesotans who teach our children, keep our communities safe, fix our roads and bridges, run our local businesses, and take care of our most vulnerable. We should have been focused on stabilizing affordable housing efforts, improving our schools, protecting our environment and keeping our streets safer. Unfortunately, Republican Majorities channeled their efforts towards divisive constitutional amendments that restrict rights while simultaneously compromising our working and middle class values for corporate interests.

*Following is a review of some of the important legislation affecting you and our community from this past session. There is still much work to be done. As always, it is a privilege and an honor to represent you and our community. **Please note that we will be holding a community forum to discuss these issues with you on Saturday, July 14, 2 to 4 pm, at the Division of Indian Works, 1001 East Lake Street, Minneapolis.***

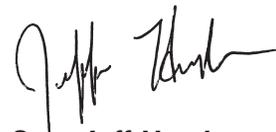
Sincerely,

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Rep. Allen opposed the “Joint Custody Bill” and Gov. Dayton vetoed it

JOBS AND LABOR

Governor Dayton and DFL legislators promoted the creation of permanent, good-paying jobs, through targeted and proven strategies. These initiatives did NOT pass but would have included:

New Jobs Tax Credits: This would have provided businesses with a \$3,000 tax credit for each unemployed Minnesotan, veteran or recent grad hired in calendar year 2012 and a \$1,500 credit for each new hire through June 2013.

Workforce training: New Opportunity Grants would have helped adults pursue short-term training goals at Minnesota state colleges and universities, expanding the FastTRAC Initiative helps adults get basic skills education and career-specific training in fields where new skills are in high demand and a new Bridge to Work program would have allowed hundred of unemployed MN workers to receive unemployment benefits during an 8-wk training program with a potential employer.

Investment: See the bonding bill below that will create at least 13,500 jobs. A provision called CapCo to create a tax credit for investment in early stage MN companies did NOT pass.

Jobs Bills that DID PASS and become law include:

Demolition Loans: Local development authorities can apply for loan from the MN Department of Employment

and Economic Development to demolish buildings at commercial sites for re-development.

Independent Contractors: Construction companies cannot classify employees as independent contractors in order to avoid payroll taxes, Workers’ Compensation, Unemployment benefits and overtime pay.

Window Washer Safety: requires all new buildings 4 stories or over to have roof anchors for suspended window washing

TAX FAIRNESS

Minnesota’s taxes have grown more regressive over the last ten years, with poor and middle class families picking up more of the overall tax burden than the richest 10% of the state. Right now, the richest Minnesotans pay a lower percentage of their income than middle class families.

We and our DFL colleagues made many attempts to reverse that trend and restore tax fairness, both in the 2011 and 2012 legislative sessions. For example, several times DFLers offered plans to restore the Homestead Credit, reduce property taxes and to pay for that by closing corporate tax loop holes. While that didn’t get anywhere in the current Republican-controlled state legislature, a new majority in the Legislature may work in partnership with Governor Dayton to restore tax fairness for all income groups next year. DFLers did successfully stop a 40% cut to renter’s credit proposed by Republicans (averaged \$213 cut per renter).

VIKINGS STADIUM

The issue of whether to fund a Vikings stadium dominated media attention over the past few months, though we believed there were more important legislative priorities. After many hurdles and long debates, the bill passed the House 70 – 61 and the Senate 36 – 30.

We were very troubled by the reliance on expanding legalized gambling, the rejection of any kind of “user fees” to fund the stadium, and the overriding of the Minneapolis City Charter (which had required a city-wide referendum vote for appropriating more than \$10m for a new stadium). While we did sympathize with the potential for economic development a stadium could produce, and we voted against the final bill, we also worked hard to get stronger construction hiring commitments for women

and communities of color and for a “clawback” provision that requires the Vikings to pay back up to 25% if they are sold within 10 years, less if 10- 20 years. We appreciated hearing from many of you on this issue.

THE STATE BONDING BILL

With a majority of Democratic legislators’ votes and just a small fraction of Republican votes, the Minnesota State Legislature passed a modest bonding bill that will invest in statewide road and infrastructure construction projects and create up to 13,500 jobs. Democrats supported Governor Mark Dayton’s \$760 million bonding proposal that promised as many as 21,000 new jobs but, in the spirit of compromise, agreed to a smaller package of \$496 million that Republicans could support.

- **The Phillips Community Center Swimming Pool:** The community center pool was saved and reconstruction will be funded at \$1,750,000 from state bonds with \$375,000 promised from Hennepin County. This will be the only public indoor swimming pool open year round in Minneapolis. It was successfully presented by neighborhood activists as a “civil rights issue” that will help address the shamefully high drowning rates among communities of color: Minnesota’s African Americans have the highest drowning rate and Native American Minnesotans have the third highest drowning rate in the United States.
- **Minneapolis Community and Technical College:** The workforce program renovation at Minneapolis Community and Technical College was the priority project of all the MnSCU bonding projects. MCTC will receive \$13.3 million to modernize classrooms and remodel undersized laboratories, emulating industry standards and models and improving space utilization. Given our slow emergence out of the economic recession, investing in the restoration of this workforce program is a win for Minneapolis and the state.
- **Hennepin County Minneapolis Interchange Facility:** A \$2.5 million grant will be given to the Hennepin County Regional Railroad Authority to construct the Hennepin County Minneapolis Interchange Facility in Downtown near the Hiawatha light rail line and the Northstar commuter rail line. Unfortunately, this project was cut in half in last-minute negotiations.
- **Metropolitan Regional Parks:** Metropolitan regional parks received \$4.5 million to improve and expand the park and trail system in the metro area. Our parks and trails are an important fixture for many families in our community.
- **Washburn Center for Children Project:** Received \$5 million.

- **Heart of the Earth Interpretive Center:** The proposal we authored was not funded this year, but we will work to get it into the next bonding bill.

FUNDING OUR SCHOOLS

In order to balance last year’s budget we borrowed yet again from our schools, now owing them \$2.4 billion. Despite their political slogan of fiscal responsibility, Republicans attempted to drain what small savings we were able to capture in our budget reserves in order to put a “down payment” on the debt we owe schools. Given the sensitivity of our state budget, draining our reserves is a fiscally irresponsible move that would leave schools wide-open again for more continued borrowing.

Instead, we and our DFL colleagues attempted to amend this bill, paying back the school shift in full by closing corporate tax loopholes and preserving our budget reserves. Unfortunately, this solution was repeatedly shot down by Republicans who proposed eliminating corporate property taxes first, which Gov. Dayton vetoed.

HOUSING

With record homelessness, foreclosures and rising rental rates, DFLers made strong efforts to address our housing crisis. Only modest progress was made in 2012.

Bonding provisions included: \$30 million to the MN Housing Finance Agency for foreclosure remediation and supportive housing, including community land trusts. We successfully included a supportive housing priority to consider constructing or repairing “safe housing” for trafficked and exploited women and girls. \$5.5 million is provided for rehabbing and repairing Public Housing across the state. (The need is estimated at \$400 million state-wide).

\$2 million is provided for Harriet Tubman Center

Several Foreclosure Moratoriums were proposed. We held a “People’s Hearing” on our own foreclosure moratorium proposal since Republican committee chairs refused to grant hearings for our bills in committee. It was well attended with individuals from our neighborhoods providing compelling testimony:

HF 1886/SF 1521: This would have frozen foreclosures of owner-occupied properties for two years, with homeowners being required to pay either their current payment or 41% of their income during the moratorium, whichever is less. Additionally, it would allow renters to stay in their homes with certain limitations when their property owner faces foreclosure. Renters would be required to pay a fair market rent to the current owner for up to two years.

VETERANS

\$200,000 will go to county Veterans' Service Agencies across Minnesota to provide stronger outreach and targeted services for post-traumatic stress syndrome for our World War II, Korean, and Vietnam War veterans.



CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS

The most disappointing part of the past two years, has been the proliferation of trying to legislate through the constitution by the Republican majority. Placing a constitutional amendment on the ballot for consideration only requires a simple majority in both the Minnesota House and Senate and cannot be vetoed by the Governor. These two extreme amendments were high on the Republicans agenda and very partisan.

- The proposed anti-gay marriage constitutional amendment would put the already existing state law against marriage of same sex partners into our state constitution. It would limit the freedom to marry to only heterosexual couples. Current polls show a majority of Minnesotans support the right of committed GLBT couples to marry.
- The proposed photo ID voter registration constitutional amendment would require a government-issued photographic identification card for all voters to register to vote. It would effectively eliminate same-day voter registration and limit absentee voting rights of veterans and disabled citizens. It is expected to suppress the right to vote of nearly 80,000 Minnesotans, mostly seniors, students, and recently moved renters.

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

This year, the Legislature passed provisions relating to the Minnesota Family Investment Program, studies and policies regarding adult services, medical services, housing and the care and safety of children.

Public assistance program changes

- Restricted electronic benefit transfer cash card uses to Minnesota and surrounding states;
- Disqualified anyone found guilty of using an EBT card to purchase tobacco or alcohol for one year for the first offense, two years for the second offense and permanently for the third offense.
- Allowed data sharing between the Department of Public Safety and the Department of Human Services to determine whether any person with multiple identification cards has illegally or improperly enrolled in any DHS public assistance program, effective July 1, 2013.
- Stopped landlord vendor payments on public assistance rent for convicted drug felons when the shelter is deemed uninhabitable.
- Look back 10 years for felony drug offenses when determining eligibility for Minnesota Family Investment Program benefits.

Children and family policy changes

- Extended the number of absent days that child care providers can be reimbursed when children of young mothers, still in school, miss day care.
- Required managed care and county-based purchasing plans to implement strategies to reduce incidences of low-birth weight.
- Provided mothers wishing to relinquish their newborns without prosecution another legal option besides hospitals. Ambulances can pick up a child after a 911 call is placed by the mother or a person with the mother's permission to give up the child. The mother may relinquish her child 7 days after giving birth.
- Children in foster care who turn 18 will be able to stay in foster care until age 21 if they have not been adopted.
- Required postpartum depression information to be available at WIC Program locations.

Change to previous HHS legislation

- Repealed the Minnesota Comprehensive Health Association's six-month residency requirement for Healthy Minnesota Contribution Program enrollees.
- Delayed the 20% rate reduction to personal care assistants who are related to the assisted person until July 1, 2013.
- Delayed the mandatory bed closure for adult foster care homes until July 2013.
- Provided EMA coverage for dialysis services and for surgery, chemotherapy, radiation, and related services necessary to treat cancer, if the recipient has a cancer diagnosis that is not in remission.

Adult-related provisions

- Raised the allowable earned income level to \$500 per month for employed adults with mental illness living in group homes.

- Required adherence to new regulations regarding overnight supervision of residents in adult group homes.
- Developed a Senior LinkAge Line (612-333-1551) referral service for older adults at-risk for long-term care.
- Removed the Medical Assistance asset cap for employed persons with disabilities reaching age 65.

continue to be enforced in MN and our ability to have stronger state laws was not limited.

Studies and task forces

- Appropriated \$200,000 for a study focused on the incidence of autism among the Somali community.
- Directed the Departments of Human Services; Education; Health; and Employment and Economic Development to study supportive housing models for children diagnosed with autism disorders.
- Established the Minnesota visible child work group to improve homeless children’s well-being.
- Established a Maternal and Child Health Advisory Task Force.
- Required MDH to publicly report sexual violence data.



The Golden Eagles Youth from the Minneapolis American Indian Center visited Rep. Clark at the State Capitol

HUMAN RIGHTS

Supported Efforts to Restore Fund Transfers to Somalia

Famine and drought threaten the lives of over a quarter million people in Somalia. One important lifeline to the stricken people there is the ability of Somali-American family members and friends to wire funds to loved ones for support. But in January, most of our Minnesota banks cut off wire transfers to Somali firms, crippling Somali-American Minnesotans’ money transfer businesses. We worked hard to reverse this, authoring a resolution to Congress to restore the ability to transfer funds to Somalia and we held a “People’s Hearing” and press conference to promote public awareness and persuade Minnesota banks to reconsider.

Protected Women and Children from Potentially Dangerous Custody Battles

We fought back a radical child custody bill this session that changed the current “best interest of the child” standard to a presumption of joint legal and physical custody with equal parenting time. That change would have a chilling effect on battered women who would fear losing their children if they brought forward claims of domestic abuse that didn’t meet the “clear and convincing evidence” standard in the bill. We believe custody arrangements should be in the best interest of every child, especially when domestic violence is involved.

ENVIRONMENT

Solar energy provisions allow the state to spend up to 5% of appropriations for new or remodeled state buildings on solar electric or solar thermal to reduce long-term energy costs.

Despite Republican efforts, state water quality standards were not weakened. The federal Clean Water Act will

EDUCATION

- Bonding authority for the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system will increase from \$300 million to \$405 million as part of the omnibus higher education law.
- School districts will pay employee salary differential to those who have been deployed in the National Guard or other reserves (remaining can be used to pay for substitutes for the deployed employees).
- PSEO extended to 10th grade students to permit enrollment in career or technical courses at qualified postsecondary institutions and low-income PSEO students may apply for transportation reimbursement.
- Responsibility of overseeing trust lands was removed from the Department of Natural Resources and will be transferred to a school trust lands director and the Legislative Permanent School Fund Commission.
- Students graduating in 2017 and later must earn one digital learning course credit.
- District may enter into individualized learning agreements with students to develop individualized curriculum based on each student’s unique interests and strengths.

PUBLIC SAFETY

- Added the crime of female genital mutilation against a family or household member to the list of offenses that qualify for a harsher sentence.
- Enhanced the list of synthetic drugs, increased the penalty for selling such substances to a felony, and granted the Board of Pharmacy expedited rulemaking authority to identify new chemical formulas used by drug producers.