

State Representative District 27B

JEANNE POPPE

SESSION UPDATE

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Dear Friends,

There is increased emphasis at the Capitol this session on environmental issues, such as renewable energy and the Clean Water Legacy Act. I have outlined some of these projects in this update, as well as, what legislation is being considered.

As always, please contact me if you have any questions or concerns. I look forward to hearing from you!

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Renewable Energy

There has been a lot of discussion recently on the issue of global warming and a growing call for renewable energy. While I support and expect the increased use of renewables, I am also certain we need to move forward with care, for several reasons.

First of all, mandates can have the effect of raising utility prices, at least initially. With set mandates, utilities will have no choice but to purchase the new technology necessary to make the switch, no matter what the price. This new, increased demand can put a premium price on the equipment, adding to the bottom line of the utilities, and ultimately, the user.

We also need to make sure the infrastructure is in place to support renewable energy sources. It does little good to generate wind-powered energy in western Minnesota if the lines aren't in place to transmit it.

Mandates also have the possible consequence of causing emerging technology to be overlooked. For instance, if there is a 20% wind mandate, it may result in new technology such as hydrogen fuel cells being dismissed. Currently, the University of Minnesota is working on leading edge technology that could convert ethanol into hydrogen. It would be unfortunate if energy

mandates stood in the way of new technology by limiting the energy choices utilities can use.

The fact is, most utility companies are already moving in this direction without mandates. Their efforts to promote renewable energy by offering it to clients at a premium price have been largely successful. If this is the direction we want to go as a state and nation, we need to find ways for government to partner with the utilities, working together to find the smartest way to do this.

Renewable energy is a good idea, but mandates have the downside of focusing on time, rather than value. We need to move forward carefully with regard to renewable energy standards in a manner that benefits the user, the utilities and our natural resources.

Lead poses threat to children

The recent death of a four-year old in Minneapolis from swallowing a charm bracelet made with lead brought to light the serious danger lead poses, especially to our children.

Lead poisoning is the number one environmental health threat for children. Even very low levels of exposure can result in reduced IQ, learning disabilities, attention deficit disorders, behavioral problems, stunted growth, impaired hearing

and kidney damage. High levels of exposure can cause mental retardation, coma, and, as we saw last month, even death. We need to address this threat before we lose any more kids.

Recently, legislation was introduced to help prevent tragic accidents such as this, as well as reduce the overall level of lead in the environment. The centerpiece of the legislation is a bill that would ban the sale or distribution of costume jewelry that contains lead.

Since 2003, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission has issued about a dozen lead warnings on products such as rings, necklaces, earrings and bracelets that were sold in gumball machines and at large retailers. There are federal standards, but companies are not forced to act until they discover that a product contains more lead than is allowed. This lax enforcement allows the products to be distributed to the public, putting kids at risk.

The lead package would also include legislation to establish a lead prevention program within the Department of Health & Human Services, increase screening of

kids in high-risk areas and help for communities and property owners to remove lead hazards.

The good news is that lead poisoning is preventable. We know how to remove and seal up peeling lead paint to protect children from brain damage. We can remove lead jewelry and other products from the market. What we need is the commitment to make sure that our children aren't poisoned and robbed of their potential.

Mercury Reduction

There was legislation introduced recently to reduce mercury pollution in Minnesota. Mercury contamination poses serious risks to the health of Minnesotans – especially our children – and the safety of our water and fish.

One component of the bill strives to reduce mercury emissions from two major Minnesota power plants by 90% by the year 2013. It calls for utilities operating large power plants that produce more than 750 MW of power to establish a mercury emissions monitoring plan.

Another component of this plan calls for increased recycling of fluorescent light bulbs. The proposal

would require utilities, lighting manufacturers and retailers to inform consumers that fluorescent light bulbs contain mercury.

Most consumers are unaware that fluorescent light bulbs contain mercury, or that it's against the law to throw them in the garbage. By recycling fluorescent light bulbs, consumers can take 100 pounds of mercury out of Minnesota's environment every year.

Clean Water Legacy Act

Legislation is being considered once again this session that will fund cleaning up lakes, rivers and streams in Minnesota. While everyone agrees this is an important priority for Minnesota, the dispute lies in how to fund it.

A bill passed by the Senate would increase the state sales tax to fund a variety of programs - including Clean Water. The House version, which is working its way through committee, would take a portion of the existing sales tax. Both bills would provide one-quarter of a cent of the sales tax for cleaning up our impaired waters.

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