

CAPITOL UPDATE



State Representative Joe Atkins

DECEMBER 2005

“Warm wishes to you and your family this holiday season.” – Joe Atkins

ATKINS TAKES AIM AT PROPERTY TAX INCREASES

State Representative Joe Atkins is pushing for state surplus revenues to be used for property tax relief.

“Every person I talk to is facing a huge property tax increase on their home this year,” said Atkins. “It’s like the Grinch stealing Christmas.” The combination of school, city and county tax levies is leading to proposed property tax hikes of 20% or more, the largest increases in over a decade. “There are some folks, particularly seniors on a fixed income and young families, who are really being squeezed and don’t know where to turn,” he added.

The State of Minnesota has experienced the largest financial turnaround in its history during Atkins’ time in office. When Representative Atkins was elected to the legislature in 2002,

the state faced the largest deficit in its history, a record \$4.5 billion shortfall. Today, the state has a \$1 billion surplus.

Representative Atkins has a long history of working to hold down property taxes. When he was the mayor of Inver Grove Heights from 1993 – 2002, the community’s property tax rate went from one of the highest to the third lowest in the state for communities of 20,000 residents or more.

Atkins has called upon his fellow lawmakers to utilize at least a portion of the surplus for property tax relief. “We probably can’t apply the entire surplus to property tax relief, but we need to help as much as we can. If we don’t, huge property tax increases will create a crisis for many families,” he said.

CONDEMNATION: ATKINS STANDING UP FOR HOMEOWNERS AND SMALL BUSINESS

The U.S. Supreme Court recently ruled that cities can use condemnation to force homeowners and small businesses to give up their property when officials decide it stands in the way of economic development.

Rep. Joe Atkins thinks that’s wrong. Atkins, though a mayor for 10 years, opposes the use of condemnation for economic development, and never used condemnation as mayor.

“This ruling means a homeowner or small business can have their property taken to make room for another business preferred by government,” Atkins commented. “Homeowners and small business folks deserve protection from such abuse, and I’m going to do all I can to make sure they get that protection.”

For more information about this and other issues, visit Joe’s website at www.JoeAtkins.com

MEDICARE PART D ENROLLMENT BEGINS

Enrollment in the new Medicare Prescription Drug Benefit for seniors age 65 and over is underway.

“Deciding if you should enroll and choosing a plan can be overwhelming,” said Rep. Joe Atkins. “To help with that, we have set up a hotline to help seniors through the maze of choices and hopefully save some money on prescription drugs.”

The following state and national resources offer assistance to Medicare beneficiaries and their families:

- **Minnesota Senior LinkAge Line**, 1-800-333-2433. Speak to a specially trained staff person from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday through Friday, and from 8 a.m. to noon on Saturdays. Counselors will make home visits.
- **Medicare**, 1-800-633-4227, open at all times.
- **Minnesota Senior Federation**, 651-645-0261, 10 a.m. to noon, 1-3 p.m. weekdays.
- If you are connected to the Internet, you can compare plans online at www.medicare.gov and www.benefitscheckuprx.org

Enrollment extends penalty-free to May 15, 2006.



State Representative Joe Atkins appeared recently on 'Newsmakers' with Colleen Needles, to discuss efforts to create scholarships for local high school students. Ms. Needles is a former anchor with WCCO.

December 2005 Legislative Survey

1.) Under current law, much of the \$1 billion state surplus will go to schools for delayed payments. How should any remaining surplus money be used?

- Property tax relief
- Heating assistance
- Transportation projects
- Cleaning up polluted lakes and rivers
- Other

2.) Should expiration dates on gift cards and gift certificates be outlawed?

Yes No

3.) In your opinion, should the state be doing more to prepare for the possibility of a flu outbreak?

Yes No

4.) Should the state consider funding for a light rail line connecting our area to downtown St. Paul?

Yes No

E-mail your responses to:
rep.joe.atkins@house.mn

or, you can clip and mail to:
Rep. Joe Atkins
2463 78th St. E.
Inver Grove Heights, MN 55076

Name: _____

Address: _____

City/State: _____ Zip: _____

E-Mail: _____