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ISSUES OF INTEREST FOR MINNEAPOLIS RESIDENTS

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Dear Neighbors,

The 2006 Legislative session is well underway, and things continue to move quickly in this shortened session. I am optimistic that the session will be short and focused – we heard from many of you during the recess that you want your leaders to focus on getting things done. Topping my list of priorities this year will be the bonding bill, a proposal to change the way Minneapolis School Board elections are held, fair immigration policies and assisting moving several important environmental initiatives.

I'll be sending periodic Capitol Updates to let you know how these and other issues are progressing. This is my first newsletter using slightly different technology. The technology people here tell me that the new software will make it be easier for constituents to sign up for updates and to unsubscribe as well. Please let me know how the new technology impacts the newsletter.

As always, feel free to contact my office with thoughts, concerns and suggestions. And if you find yourself at the Capitol, please stop in for a visit. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely, 

1. **Minneapolis School Board election reform**
2. **Immigration policy**
3. **Car sharing tax relief**
4. **Constituent survey online**

MINNEAPOLIS SCHOOL BOARD ELECTION REFORM

I believe that all families and all communities deserve representation on the Minneapolis School Board. And all families should feel confident that their school board members are accountable, responsive and accessible to the community.

We've heard increasing frustration from parents who say they don't feel the board is responsive to their concerns and who don't have a sense of community ownership when it comes to the school board.

Much of this frustration comes from a perceived lack of representation on the board. Currently, school board members are all elected at-large. I believe that by changing the way we select our school board members, we can increase community participation, make the school board more accountable to all parts of the city and build stronger neighborhood support for our schools.

Several weeks ago, I announced a petition drive in support of governance reform in the Minneapolis Public Schools along with Senator Skoglund and several other legislators and parents. Under the plan board members would be elected from a mix of geographic districts and at-large, rather than through the current all at-large, citywide elections. This structure is similar to the governance structure used to elect commissioners to the Minneapolis Park Board.

The plan is not unique - several school districts in Minnesota already elect their members by district, and 2 out of 3 of the school boards cited for excellence in 2005 by the national Council of Urban Boards of Education use a similar governance model. The legislation has the strong backing of several grassroots community organizations and of Minneapolis Mayor R.T. Rybak.

This is a grassroots effort. If you'd like to sign an online version of the petition, you can find it at: www.petitiononline.com/cbjd315/petition.html. You can also print a copy by going to my legislative website at: www.house.leg.state.mn.us/62A

IMMIGRATION POLICY

Much attention has been paid recently to the issue of undocumented immigrants in Minnesota. While we certainly have to find common ground on problems like prohibiting the use of false identification and cracking down on human trafficking, recent reports

seem to have greatly exaggerated statistics on illegal immigration. We can also all agree that the current federal immigration system is simply broken and needs a comprehensive fix.

Just this week the House voted to override the city of Minneapolis ordinance that currently insures that all residents receive city services without regard to their immigration status. This assurance allows all residents who may be crime victims or witnesses to come forward without fear that seeking police assistance, or assisting the police, will result in they or a loved one being deported. When this bill was heard in committee, law enforcement officials presented compelling testimony of the importance of that assurance in allowing police to build positive relations with immigrant communities, relationships that are crucial in keeping us all safer. Additionally, police have consistently reported that the federal Immigration and Customs enforcement agency responds only when undocumented individual are arrested for aggravated felonies.

Currently police are required to ask citizenship status of people at the time of arrest - this bill would shift them into enforcing federal immigrations laws, making Minnesota the first state in the nation to override such local separation ordinances. Chief McManus along with St. Paul Chief John Harrington and other law enforcement personnel have stated their opposition to this bill. I will continue to strongly oppose this legislation, and will work instead for a comprehensive solution that helps undocumented workers become legal and productive members of our community.

CAR SHARING RENTAL TAX EXEMPTION

Last week HourCar, a car sharing service, opened a new site at the 46th street Hiawatha LRT station. Car sharing has become an increasingly popular option for residents. Supporters say such programs improve air quality, conserve fuel, relieve traffic congestion, and reduce demand for parking space. Recently I proposed legislation that would exempt car-sharing organizations from some taxes and fees that apply to traditional car rental agencies. I have been struck by the growing number of families who move into our area in order to live near the Hiawatha line. This proposal would make car sharing more affordable, facilitating more families to choose the option of being single-car or no-car households.

ANNUAL CONSTITUENT SURVEY

My annual constituent survey has been posted online at my legislative website.

Please surf there and take a few minutes to fill it out: www.house.mn/62A

Or if you prefer to have a copy of the survey mailed to you, call (651) 296-0173.