



Capitol Contact by State Representative Steve Simon

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Dear Friend:

Welcome to the first edition of *Capitol Contact*. During the legislative session, I will regularly share one-page updates on important issues and developments. As always, I welcome your ideas, comments and questions. I am grateful for the tremendous honor and privilege of serving in the Minnesota House of Representatives. My goal and my hope is to do the very best I can for St. Louis Park, for Hopkins, and for the State of Minnesota as a whole.

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State Budget Update: Finding A Solution

From a budget standpoint, this is a difficult time for Minnesota. We now face a \$1.4 billion deficit (including inflation) for the upcoming budget cycle. A fair and successful budget for Minnesota will require compromise and a willingness by legislators to work together. The governor has released his budget recommendations. Over the next several weeks, I will be working as part of a team to improve upon those recommendations. I look forward to being part of a meaningful budget solution.

Here are my preliminary thoughts and observations:

K-12 Education: The governor proposes a 2% percent increase in funding for education. I believe that a 2% increase is not enough to help us fund our schools. Under the governor's plan, both the Hopkins and St. Louis Park school districts face large and painful cuts—which could result in larger class sizes, fewer course offerings, and decreased services for at-risk kids.

Health Care: The governor proposes to tighten health care eligibility for people who work. As many as 40,000 working Minnesotans may lose their current health care coverage. While I applaud the governor for drawing attention to rising health care costs, I believe that his priorities are misplaced. There are better ways to control health care costs than by taking health care away from productive workers.

Transportation: As a member of the Transportation Committee, I have learned how large our transportation needs really are. The governor is proposing a 4.4% increase in transportation funding. Unfortunately, he does not propose any long-term revenue source for urgent and continuing construction costs—even though several business groups have urged an increase in the gas tax (which has not been raised since 1988). In my opinion, a practical solution will probably require new revenue for the construction of roads, bridges, and transit options.

Bonding Bill: Some Good News (So Far) For St. Louis Park

"Bonding" refers to the process by which the state pays for certain large one-time construction projects (like roads, bridges, trails, and buildings). The money for bonding projects comes from the sale of state-issued bonds. Last year, the Legislature was supposed to approve a bonding bill, but the entire process was bogged down by partisan politics. This year, we are off to a speedy start.

I have authored a bill to fund St. Louis Park's top bonding priority: the construction of a pedestrian bridge crossing over Highway 7, connecting two regional trails. I'm pleased to report that, with bipartisan support, the project was just approved by the House. I am now working to preserve funding for this project in the final version of the bonding bill.