



State Representative Dan Severson

2006 Report from the Capitol



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Veterans look to Severson to act on their behalf

As a retired Navy fighter pilot, Rep. Severson understands the struggles military veterans deal with in Minnesota. That's why he's authored many pieces of legislation aimed at helping our veterans.

In 2006, Rep. Severson authored Gov. Pawlenty's veterans initiatives package in the Minnesota House. It would require Minnesota's public colleges and universities to use standards used in other states to grant credit for military training and experience. It would also make it easier for veterans to return to the state for their higher education by giving them

in-state tuition rates, along with delaying tuition payments until their federal GI Bill funding is received and creating veterans assistance offices on campuses.



Rep. Severson highlights his veterans initiatives on the House floor.

provides service enhancement grants for county veterans service officers.

SUPPORT TROOPS LICENSE PLATES
In December 2005, Gov. Pawlenty unveiled the new "Support Our Troops" license plates, and announced they are ready for public purchase. Legislation calling for the plates was authored by Rep. Severson.

Proceeds from the plate sales will be split between the Department of Military Affairs for financial support of military families and the Department of Veteran Affairs for veterans outreach programs,

See VETERANS on page 3

Severson helps approve near-record education funding increase

Minnesota schools will receive record amounts of new funding for classrooms and special programs while also becoming more accountable to students and their parents as a result of the Legislature making K-12 education its top priority in 2005.

The \$12.4 billion education funding plan approved by Rep. Severson includes a total of \$800 million in new spending for the next two school years. Much of that spending will go directly into classrooms. Each of the next two years, local schools will receive a 4 percent basic formula increase per student.

Local school districts will see a significant benefit. The Sauk Rapids school district would receive \$263 more per pupil in 2006 and \$554 more in 2007; Holdingford would get \$226 more in 2006 and \$517 more in 2007; Royalton receives an additional \$308 in 2006 and \$632 more in 2007; and Sartell would receive an additional \$225 per pupil in 2006 and \$520 per pupil in 2007.

While the 2005 Education Finance Plan pro-

vides important new funding, it also marks a move toward greater accountability between the school system and taxpayers.

The most notable and important of the new reforms is QComp, short for Quality Compensation for Quality Teachers. QComp adds a financial incentive to teaching and bases it partly on student performance. QComp is optional, but schools that do choose to participate will receive funding bonuses up to \$260 per pupil.

In 2006, the House Education Committee passed a bill for teachers which Rep. Severson hopes will get greater attention in the future. It would allow qualified mid-career professionals to obtain a teaching license in specified fields without having to complete an entire teaching degree program. With a shortage of highly qualified math and science teachers, it just makes sense to enable these professionals the opportunity to share their experience in the classroom. This is the kind of education reform legislation that puts students first.



Rep. Severson enjoys meeting with school groups when they visit the State Capitol.

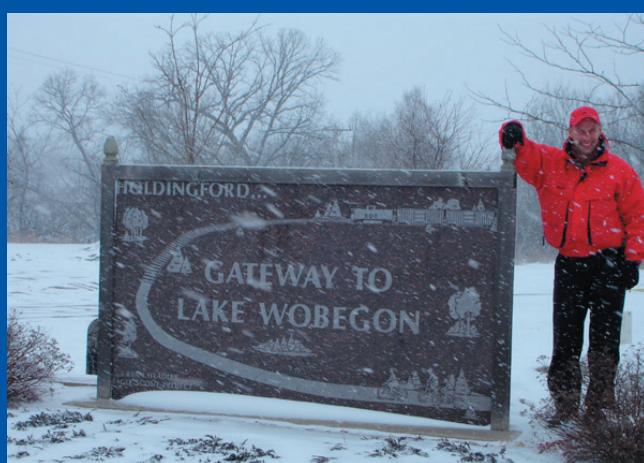
STATE REPRESENTATIVE DAN SEVERSON



The Severson family includes Dan; his wife, Cathy Jo; daughter Nicole; and son Sgt. Joshua, who is currently deployed in Iraq.



Rep. Severson testifies before committee in support of his bill to prevent litigation expenses from driving up the cost of housing. With him is Pam Perri Weaver, executive vice president of the Builders Association of Minnesota.



Rep. Severson visits the community of Holdingford last winter.

2006 Legislative Survey Results

- 1) Property tax relief?
83% yes 17% no
- 2) Amendment to limit state spending?
79% yes 21% no
- 3) Ban teacher negotiations during school year?
79% yes 21% no
- 4) Identity theft legislation a high priority?
84% yes 16% no
- 5) Support light rail and Northstar commuter rail?
74% yes 26% no
- 6) Require photo ID for voting?
87% yes 13% no
- 7) Residency requirement for welfare benefits?
95% yes 5% no
- 8) Support medical litigation reform?
87% yes 13% no
- 9) Pay to create universal health care?
26% yes 74% no
- 10) Should state override local sanctuary laws?
74% yes 26% no
- 11) English as official state language?
92% yes 8% no
- 12) Which stadium plan merits the most support?
Twins 20% Vikings 16%
Gophers 14% None 50%
- 13) How pay to clean up state's waters?
None 21%
Sales tax 37%
Water fee 42%

Severson knows his district's priorities

Rep. Severson has authored a great deal of legislation aimed at improving things in District 14A.

SAUK RAPIDS BRIDGE

In 2006, Severson introduced legislation (HF3352) requesting \$5 million in state bonding dollars for roadway improvements for the Sauk Rapids bridge.

"This bridge is a crucial transportation artery in Sauk Rapids," he said. "We're getting our new bridge, and now the roadways connecting to it need to be improved as well."

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in several central-Minnesota cities.

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I want the St. Cloud region to be the emphasis for our state."

The first bill (HF3547) requests \$2 million in funds to be used for several projects. The first is a \$900,000 grant to the city of St. Cloud to acquire land and to install public utilities for the expansion of the I-94 business park. About \$100,000 would go to Stearns County to acquire an easement and equipment to implement methane digester technology.

WATERSHED ELECTIONS

Local watershed districts have the legal authority to tax those who reside in that district. However, the board members of those districts are not elected, and Rep. Severson introduced a bill to change that.

The bill (HF3071) would require that all Minnesota watershed district managers are voted on during the general election.

The bill also would place some added pressure on districts to accomplish its goals. According to the bill, a district would be automatically terminated if it has not successfully completed a project within five years of its creation. A termination petition must be

About \$500,000 would go to the Board of Regents of the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities to renovate and equip the Wick Science Center at St. Cloud State University with specialized equipment, including a scanning probe. The final \$200,000 would go to St. Cloud Technical College to acquire specialized refrigeration units used in transportation of pharmaceuticals.

Severson authored a second bill (HF3561) calling for the designation of additional biotechnology and health science industry zones throughout Minnesota. It was signed into law.

Rep. Severson also supported:

- ◆ Personal Protection Act
- ◆ Twins Stadium with no state funds
- ◆ MVST Constitutional Amendment
- ◆ Reducing mercury emissions

Bill calls for reimbursement rate hike at local nursing homes

The nursing facilities in the St. Cloud area have a lower medical assistance operating payment rate compared to those in the Twin Cities area.

Since our region is so close to the metro area and competes for the same workforce, Rep. Severson believes an increase is needed to keep the St. Cloud area competitive. The lower payment rates were originally based on geographical areas.

In 2006, Rep. Severson introduced legislation requesting an increase in the reimbursement rates for nursing homes in Benton, Sherburne and Stearns counties.

The House passed legislation in 2006 that requires pricing trans-

parency for all health care providers, including hospitals and pharmacies -- a measure that will empower consumers with more information and better enable individuals to compare health services and prices.

In 2005, the Legislature passed a \$9 billion health & human services bill that restores eligibility for those enrolled in Minnesota-Care, the state subsidized health insurance program. Costs were somewhat contained in that state health care programs will increase by 15 percent instead of the projected 20 percent increase.

More significant, legislation was passed that will help small businesses obtain affordable health care insurance for their employees. It eases state health

care mandates in order to expand health insurance options for small businesses. The change will take pressure off the public health care system.

Nursing homes and group homes will see a 2.26 percent cost-of-living increase in 2006 and a 2.26 percent increase in 2007.



Rep. Severson serves on the Technology, Bioscience and Medical Products Division Committee.

Protecting families from funeral protesters

Legislature also approved local sales tax, funding for airport expansion, building projects

Historically burial services have been designated as private moments for family and friends to honor the deceased. However, as the ideological sides of people and organizations continue to bubble over, these services have become targets for political or social protests.

Rep. Severson was one of several legislators in 2006 who introduced a bill that would prohibit the disruption of a funeral, burial service or memorial service, and would create penalties for those who do. The final bill, signed into law, has a setback of 500 feet at a funeral ceremony, graveside or memorial service to

protect grieving families.

INSURANCE VERIFICATION

Rep. Severson authored legislation involving township mutual insurance companies and the areas in which they can provide property insurance coverage. Township mutuals are insurance companies owned by their policyholders. They have traditionally provided coverage in predominantly rural areas. The bill involves cities of the second class, which have between 20,000 and 100,000 population.

ST. CLOUD AIRPORT

In 2005, Rep. Severson authored legislation appropriating money

to purchase land to expand the St. Cloud Regional Airport.

It would be for a grant to the city of St. Cloud to acquire additional property in order to increase the airport's operations. A \$2 million appropriation was included in the 2006 bonding package.

BONDING PROJECTS

The 2006 Capital Investment bill including state funding for:

- \$14 million for St. Cloud State's Wick Science Building
- \$4.5 million for renovation and expansion of St. Cloud State's Riverview Hall
- \$1.5 million to replace roofs, ventilation and windows at St. Cloud State

• \$350,000 to replace energy management system, roof, boiler and electrical distribution at St. Cloud Tech.

SALES TAX

Six St. Cloud-area communities will be allowed to impose a local sales tax, according to legislation that was signed into law in 2005.

Rep. Severson's bill (HF2054) would allow Sartell, Sauk Rapids, St. Augusta, St. Cloud, St. Joseph and Waite Park to collect a half-cent local sales and use tax, providing all the cities agree to use it for the same purposes and receive voter approval to do so.

Veterans: Hire a Vet Month

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grants to veterans service organizations and rehabilitation programs.

HIRE A VET MONTH
Signed into law in 2005 was legislation authored by Rep. Severson that designates the month of May as "Hire a Veteran Month" in Minnesota. The measure urges state and local governments and agencies to give fair and appropriate considerations to hiring

military veterans.

OTHER LEGISLATION

Rep. Severson authored and endorsed the House Republican agenda supporting Minnesota's military veterans, including fully funding the National Guard tuition reimbursement at 100 percent; funding the National Guard Re-enlistment Investment Program; funding the World War II Memorial.

Eminent domain, immigration reform

The Legislature in 2006 addressed the concern of many Minnesotans that our Constitution protect private property rights, except for in the case of "public use." Rep. Severson voted for an eminent domain reform bill allows private property owners in Minnesota to protect their land and homes from government takings by affording citizens more protections in law than they had before.

Rep. Severson voted for legislation requiring that a voter registration application be accompanied by a passport, birth certificate or naturalization document. He also supported legislation establishing proof of identity in order to obtain a Minnesota driver's license, including having a status check date written on the license.

Rep. Severson also voted for an \$88 million supplemental budget bill that addresses public safety, veterans, higher education and deficiencies in state government. Nearly 75 percent of the bill is earmarked for deficiencies in government spending. The bill provides \$66 million to lock-up sex offenders, \$3 million for assistance programs, service enhancement grants and Internet support services for veterans, and \$10 million in water quality appropriations.

Severson authors marriage amendment

In 2005, Rep. Severson became the chief House author of the Defense of Marriage Amendment. He joined the majority of legislators in the



Rep. Severson spoke at a Minnesotans for Marriage rally at the State Capitol in 2005.

Minnesota House by passing the “marriage amendment” - a bill that calls for a constitutional amendment to be placed on the ballot asking voters whether marriage should be defined as a union between a man and a woman. Once again, the Minnesota Senate failed to act on the bill.

In 1993, the Legislature approved adding sexual orientation to the state's Human Rights Act, protecting gays and lesbians from unfair discrimination concerning employment, insurance and renting or leasing property. But added to the law was a provision that specifically states that it was not intended to "authorize the recognition of or the right of marriage between persons of the same sex." Yet today, the "right" is being debated by many groups of people.

In 1997, the Legislature passed the Defense of Marriage Act, adding more statutory authority to the definition of marriage as a union between a man and a woman. But Severson said it is clear that citizens would need to amend the Constitution to protect against the state statute from possibly being struck down someday. This action is already happening in other states.

The recent bill arose as a result of state court rulings in Massachusetts and California that said states cannot prohibit same-sex marriage. Many lawmakers feel these rulings could be used to undo Minnesota's Defense of Marriage Act.

Severson believes the state sanctions marriage - between a man and a woman - for the sake of raising families and to contribute to the long-term well-being of the state. He added that it is unfortunate that House Republicans have to engage in such rancorous debate with Minnesota Senate DFL leaders just to let the people vote on the marriage amendment and uphold the beliefs of the majority.

CRIME ISSUES

New sex-offender law takes effect

Rep. Severson was pleased the Legislature approved public safety provisions in 2005 that include life prison sentences on Minnesota's most horrific sex offenders.

The new law is aimed at the “worst of the worst” among our state’s sexual predators. The sexual offender provisions include life-without-release for repeat serious sex offenders, life-without-release for first-time sex offenders who commit heinous crimes. Electronic bracelets and more parole officers to watch lesser sex criminals on release from prison are also provided, as is a new crime of criminal sexual predatory conduct that will add years to sentences.

Another part of the bill allows public safety officials to take DNA from suspects of violent crimes or sexual offenses when a judge finds probable cause that they committed violent crimes.

Severson said the legislation sends sex offenders a clear message: commit a violent sex crime, and prepare to spend the rest of your life behind bars.

New methamphetamine law looks to curb drug production

To address the growing methamphetamine problem, lawmakers approved legislation in 2005 that limits the sales on some of the potential ingredients used to create the deadly drug.

The legislation calls for storing certain concentrated products used in meth production, like Sudafed, behind pharmacy counters. People will now have to show a photo ID and sign a log to purchase these products. Gel caps and liquid products containing pseudo ephedrine will still be allowed for retail sales, but if it is determined they are involved in meth production they will also be restricted.

The bill also provides tougher penalties for meth producers and pushers, treatment money for addicts, and 10 new BCA agents to track down and crack down on the labs.

Severson said meth production has declined in Greater Minnesota thanks to the 2005 law, and the number of meth labs has dropped by 70 percent in the first nine months of placing pseudo ephedrine products behind the counters.

Making our economy stronger

In February, the State Finance Department projected that revenues to the state (the taxes we pay) could result in a \$1.9 billion surplus in the 2008-09 fiscal period. Even though the economy could hit some hard spots, it's a positive indication that the state economy is growing, albeit slowly, and that more people are working. No state tax increases were needed. Legislators rely on these forecasts to set budgets for general fund spending - or tax cuts.

Parents will benefit from investing in their children's education because the Legislature removed the \$2,000 per family limit on the K-12 education tax credit. The maximum per-child credit is still \$1,000, but for an unlimited number of children. Teachers also stand to benefit. The \$250 deduction for classroom materials bought by teachers is extended through tax year 2005.

Finally, individuals and families who contribute to Health Savings Accounts will now be able to deduct those contributions from their income tax. Individuals can deduct as much as \$2,250 and families can deduct \$4,500. Severson said Health Savings Accounts empower health care consumers by giving them more control over their health care options and will help lower overall health care costs.

Here's how to contact Rep. Severson:

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