



Senate District 54 DFL Newsletter

July 2009
Vol. 18 No. 1

Gem Lake . Lauderdale . Little Canada . Roseville . Shoreview . St. Anthony . Vadnais Heights

What's New in SD54

Michele Courneya, Chair

By the time you read this, Governor Pawlenty's budget cuts by "unallotment" (reduction or elimination of funding for existing programs) will be effective. Predictably, the deepest cuts were made in places such as Local Government Aid where he could pass the buck and blame someone else. It also includes cuts for the people who suffer the consequences and are the least able to defend themselves like GMAC which provides medical assistance to low income adults without dependent children. Over 80 percent of the recipients of this assistance are mentally ill and/or chemically dependent. Unless a successful legal challenge is mounted to prevent this "state budget decided by the governor alone" misuse of unallotment, we can expect many more budgets that ignore the needs of the people as expressed by their legislators. One more reason we need a Democrat elected governor in 2010.

One of the programs that lost its funding in this process is the Political Contribution Refund (PCR) program. Individuals who donated \$50 and couples who donated \$100 to a political party or candidate could get that donation refunded by the state. This gives all Minnesotans a chance to make their voices heard and support the political party and candidates of their choice. Now, only donations that were received by the political party or candidate on or before June 30, 2009 will be eligible for a refund. There will be *no* PCR refund available for donations made after July 1, 2009 through June 30, 2011.

Getting PCR eligible donations was the core of our SD54 fundraising efforts in early 2009. Many of you received emails and phone calls from us over the past several months as donations were coming in from around the district. We also attempted a mass emergency appeal for donations before the June 30 deadline so donors could receive the refund. Many thanks to all of you who did answer our call and donated. All donations received

before June 30 are eligible for the refund. You have until April, 2010, to file the necessary paperwork to get the refund. We suggest, however, you do not wait until that deadline.

We will continue to gratefully accept donations from those who are willing and able to give without expecting a refund. Although we will likely not make our fundraising goals without the PCR program, we will not be pursuing donations as aggressively as previously. In these hard times, when not a day goes by that you don't hear about another layoff, another lost home, adult kids moving home, or parents moving in with their adult children, we do not wish to add to the stress. We will continue to have donation jars at our events. We will, of course, be asking for your help staffing the donut booth, our primary fundraiser, and for any kind of volunteer help you would like to provide. With the donations we have received and these ongoing efforts, we believe we will have enough money to keep operating, publish the SD54 Newsletter, hold caucuses and a convention, and meet our basic obligations. We will keep you posted.

Come to the SD54 Potluck Picnic July 16, 6:00-9:00 p.m. at the Lion's Pavilion, Roseville Central Park. It's free. We provide beverages, brats, and paper products. Bring a dish to share if you can, and a donation for the food shelf. Enjoy the plentiful political talk and have fun with your DFL friends.

Lareau honored

Congratulations to *Beth Lareau*, inducted into the DFL Women's Hall of Fame on June 6, 2009. The women honored represent a broad range of activists statewide that make up our DFL party. *Way to go, Beth*, we are proud that you have been a contributing member of Senate District 54 as well as the State DFL. Look for more on Beth's accomplishments in a later issue.

DFL Central Committee Meeting

Julianne Johnston

The DFL Central Committee Meeting was held on Saturday 13, 2009, in the extraordinary Hibbing High School auditorium, with its blue velvet drapes with gold fringe trim, exquisite frescoes, and incredible chandeliers. It is a tremendous tribute to the community and mining industry that believed in the future of Minnesota and the Iron Range. They were willing to make the investment in a school (built in 1920) that is so beautiful and is still a functional part of the community. I remember having a class there when I went to Junior College in Hibbing before a separate campus was built (both high school and junior college were held in one building). Norm Hanson remembers coming from Cromwell to hear Eleanor Roosevelt speak when he was in high school. We were both looking forward to seeing this grand school and auditorium again.

The meeting, called to order by Brian Melendez, included reports of the officers and committee chairs. The budget appears to be on track, but with the recession, there is cause to be concerned about the incoming revenues and donations.

We were privileged to hear speeches by eight candidates for governor: Senator Paul Thissen expressed a need to define ourselves as a people; Mayor Chris Coleman asked what do we want for the future of Minnesota;

Senator Tom Baak worried about the state's financial status; Speaker of the House, Margaret Anderson Kelliher urged us to make the best better; Senator John Marty spoke of his vision for clean energy and health care for all; Steve Kelly from the Humphrey Institute pointed out Pawlenty's pint size programs; Ramsey County Attorney Susan G. Gartner urged a fresh start to use the state's gifts wisely; Representative Tom Rukavina identified himself as the conscience of the legislature for the past 23 years. Mark Dayton, also a candidate, was not able to attend. We are truly fortunate to have so many talented people willing to serve as our next governor.

Brian Melendez prefacing a discussion on the precinct caucus for the next presidential election year, asked us to consider the following:

- Who should decide whether there will be caucuses and should they be with or without a presidential preference ballot?
- Should the DFL have an internal only presidential primary?
- How should delegates be allocated to the National Convention?
- When should any system changes be effective?

These questions were followed by open discussion and comments from members about the past caucuses, suggestions for the future, and recommendations based on the individual senate district and county unit experiences.

Five SD54 members represented the district at the meeting: Norm Hanson, Peter Berglund, Beth Lareau, Ivor Matz, and me. The session adjourned to the Knights of Columbus meeting hall for a fabulous barbecue dinner. Wish you could all have been there to enjoy the day with us.

The Senate District 54 *Newsletter* is published six times a year to inform and educate interested parties of the happenings within SD54 DFL. The *Newsletter* provides opportunities for readers to submit articles for publication on various subjects of interest to this audience. The Newsletter Committee reserves the right to edit articles as appropriate to meet these goals and space restrictions.

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—Perspective on Labor—

I've been a Teamster truck driver since 1976 and during that time I have seen a steady decline in labor's power and a parallel decline in living standards. Wages have not kept up with inflation and rising health costs have eaten any wage-gains. Labor has compensated by working longer hours just to stay even. With the current recession/depression there is increased pressure to make even more concessions.

There is also pressure to convert safer defined benefit pensions to the riskier 401K plans. With a defined benefit you will retire with a specified amount per month. A 401K will pay whatever the stocks are worth at retirement which, in the current market, amounts to a 30-50 percent discount. As a result, more and more workers are delaying retirement into their sixties and even seventies. Others have lost their jobs, their health-care, and their homes.

Membership in a union gives workers a voice in the workplace. Union contracts agreed upon as a result of contract negotiations specify work-rules, wages, and benefits. It is said that companies get the unions they deserve: militant and confrontational in an abusive workplace, cooperative and collegial in a humane environment. Workers need labor-law reform which will facilitate union organizing. The Employee Free Choice Act will allow employees to join a union when fifty percent plus one of employees sign a card requesting union representation. This will short-circuit employer obstruction of the democratic processes and require good-faith bargaining within a specific period of time. More unionized workers will mean all workers will have a more powerful voice in our democracy.

Employers need to be relieved of the burden of paying the health costs for their employees. This unbalanced system which ties health care to employment is, in economist Dean Baker's words, "strangling our economy." Were it not for the current economic crisis we would still be in trouble because of health costs which make American manufactures uncompetitive in world markets.

I am among those who advocate for a "single-payer" system financed out of general revenues of the government, the same way we pay for defense, education, and roads. It is disturbing to me that single-payer is not currently on the table. It wasn't discussed in the recent presidential election because advocates Ralph Nader and Dennis Kucinich were not allowed to participate in the presidential debates. It is essential that single-payer be discussed equally with the other proposals and the Congressional Budget Office be directed to make an economic analysis for purposes of comparison. Without such full discussion we run the risk of further burdening households and companies with uncontrolled health costs.

Years ago on Paula Schroeder's call-in program on Minnesota Public Radio, the question was asked of business reporter Chris Farrell and Economist Robert Kuttner, "Who is this economy for, anyhow?" For a long time I think it has been managed for the benefit of the rich and mega-corporations. Who is going to buy anything when the average taxpayer/worker is so squeezed? Workers need unions so they can negotiate better wages and conditions. If more of us have more money we should all be better off. If everyone shared in the costs of health care we would all be able to make life decisions free of the worry of health costs and companies would be in a better position to participate in secure pension plans. Who is this economy for, anyway? It should be for all of us.

The best discussion of what has happened to labor in the last thirty years that I have read is a book by Jack Rasmus, The War at Home: The corporate offensive from Ronald Reagan to George W. Bush., (Kyklos Productions, 2006). It covers all labor issues during this period with policy recommendations.

Bob McNattin, Teamster Truck Driver

—SD54 Legislators Report—

Senator John Marty
Moving Forward on Health Care after a Disastrous Legislative Session. Minnesota took a big step backwards on health care reform this year. We knew from the start that it would be a difficult year when Governor Pawlenty proposed to take away health coverage from 113,000 Minnesotans. Although that proposal did not receive serious consideration at the Capitol, the health and human services budget suffered deep, painful—and I believe, unacceptable—cuts in health care affecting vulnerable Minnesotans.

The governor vetoed \$381 million in funding for General Assistance Medical Care (GAMC), a program that provides low income adults with some basic health coverage. Pawlenty’s own commissioner of human services acknowledged that the people hurt by that veto were “the sickest of the sick and the poorest of the poor.” Governor Pawlenty’s veto was truly mean-spirited. It affects some of the most vulnerable people in the state and doesn’t really save money. Some 31,000 people losing coverage will continue to need medical care. However, instead of getting it on a timely basis, they will wait until their condition deteriorates to the point that they need costly emergency room treatment. We have hit a new low.

We need a new direction. I, along with a number of colleagues, decided to tackle the health care mess head-on and introduced a comprehensive solution. We are committed to passing the Minnesota Health Plan (MHP), a single, statewide plan that would cover all Minnesotans for all their medical needs. Both SD54 representatives, Mindy Greiling and Bev Scalze, have been co-authors of this legislation from the beginning. Now we have over seventy co-authors for this bold legislation. A wide-ranging coalition of people and organizations, from the League

of Women Voters to the Minnesota Association of Social Workers, are supporting this single payer plan. Despite strong support, passing this bill will take three to four years and it will be a formidable battle. No state in the country has succeeded in delivering health care for all, despite the reality that 37 other countries have done so. Insurance companies and the pharmaceutical lobby will fight this tooth and nail.

At the national level, the Obama administration and the Congress are working to provide coverage for many of the 46 million people who have no insurance. Unfortunately, key lawmakers who have received big contributions from the industry are refusing to consider comprehensive reform which moves beyond health *insurance* to providing health *care* for all. Consequently, the federal proposal fails to address critical, systemic problems such as the shortage of primary care doctors and out-of-control costs, and it still will not cover all of the uninsured or the under-insured.

This makes passage of the MN Health Plan even more important, not just for five million Minnesotans, but also as a model for the rest of the nation. Our proposal will require strong gubernatorial leadership, which is one of the main reasons that I am running for governor. We are building momentum. The MN Health Plan passed through two Senate committees this session: the Health Committee, which I chair, and the Commerce Committee. For more information on how you can help make the Minnesota Health Plan a reality, please go to mnhealthplan.org.

Representative Mindy Greiling, 54A

No Cuts, But Education Not Held Harmless. As chair of the K-12 Education Finance Division, I am pleased that, in a year of record deficit, no cuts were made to K-12 schools. This was actually a remarkable feat and took much effort.

No one should conclude, however, that students were held harmless. Were it not for the federal stimulus money, school funding would have been cut \$500 million dollars, and the final House and Senate budget balancing proposal included paying school districts late, to the tune of \$1.8 billion. The governor vetoed this bill, but now plans to unallot this same amount, which is even worse. The legislature had included a final \$1 billion tax proposal (larger proposals were rejected or vetoed) to begin closing

Senator John Marty

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the \$7.5 billion budget deficit—an important difference from the governor’s plan. Accounting shifts, such as paying the schools late, are one-time money and must be paid back before any new money is spent on students or anything else—including health care. The governor has no plan whatsoever for paying the money back. If the money is not paid back, then it is no longer “paying schools late,” but rather a very large and permanent cut.

The Association of Metropolitan School Districts estimates that this accounting gimmick will cost schools an average of \$40 per student, either through short-term borrowing, lost interest or both. This pretty much nullifies last year’s small increase to schools of \$51 per pupil, counting inflationary costs.

Underfunding of schools is taking a huge toll. The Education Trust reports that the U. S. is the only industrialized country in which young people are less likely than their parents to graduate from high school. Minnesota’s commitment to fund our schools has waned since the late 1970s. Funding for K-12 students has not kept up with inflation since 1991—the last time we had a DFL governor. It is definitely time for another one. Even school districts able to pass levy referenda, like in SD54, feel the pinch. It is much more dire for those with small or no levies. There is not much room for cutting school budgets other than for teachers and other classroom staff.

The long-term solution to equitably and adequately fund our students is the New Minnesota Miracle, legislation I carried this year and have written about previously in this newsletter. This comprehensive proposal is supported by every major education group in the state, including the various types of districts. It was the centerpiece of the House omnibus education bill. Unfortunately, it was not included in the final bill. Like the first Minnesota Miracle, it will take a DFL governor to get it over the goal post.

Representative Bev Scalze, 54B

2009 Legislative Change for Cities. As we look back on the legislative session of 2009 during this terrible deficit year, we sometimes overlook our success in some areas. As a former city council member and a member of the State Local Government Committee, I have been working in my legislative years to assist cities perform their functions better and provide enhanced public safety for their residents. Since cities are a creation of the state, they are only able to create laws allowable by state statute. Since I was first elected, I have met regularly with our mayors and city council members regarding issues of importance to them. One change our local governments

have requested is the right to levy administrative fines on speeding drivers.

Because of problems with vehicles speeding on local streets, some 40 cities in Minnesota have been levying such fines without state approval, despite an Attorney General’s opinion that cities don’t have the right to do so. In White Bear Lake, city law enforcement personnel have been fining drivers who are speeding up to 9 miles over the speed limit. It is a city fine, and doesn’t involve the state, much like any city public safety concern.

Since the deficit of 2003 and the “fees” assessed then, added to a speeding ticket was a \$75 surcharge that went to the state general fund. This is one example of how the state “balanced its budget” in 2003.

As the result of this action local law enforcement personnel have been hesitant to give motorists speeding tickets because the fines are so large—up to \$150. Consequently, the cities tell us more warning tickets are being written, and more motorists are speeding without impact on their pocketbook or driving record.

Our local officials tell us that the #1 complaint to local government is speeding on local streets. With more people using these streets because the freeways are so jammed up, local governments have been requesting the legislature to grant them authority to levy administrative fines for speeders. These fines would be less expensive and the offense wouldn’t go on a driver’s record at the Department of Motor Vehicles. The cities only want to slow down the traffic on local streets.

I was a co-author of such a bill in 2008, but law enforcement groups weren’t all in agreement with this proposal. We introduced a bill again in 2009, and were successful in working in a bipartisan manner with such groups as the County Sheriffs Association and the Minnesota Police and Peace Officers Association to get all of the players on board for a successful bill. Of great assistance was Rep. Tony Cornish, police chief of Good Thunder, MN. He worked very hard to get the law enforcement agencies to agree to the new legislation. There was much compromise to get this bill through the committee hearing process.

Now with successful passage of the 2009 Administrative Fines law, cities have the authority to create a local ordinance that will help them slow down drivers on local streets. Local law enforcement personnel will be able to give a driver an administrative ticket for driving up to 9 miles over the speed limit. The fine will be \$60, with \$20 going to the state and \$40 staying with the local jurisdiction. The offense won’t go on a driver’s record.

However, if a driver is ticketed for driving more than 10 miles over the speed limit, the county will still be able to prosecute, the fine will be considerably larger with the \$75 surcharge going to the state, and the offense will go on the driver's record at the Department of Motor Vehicles. Our cities are very thankful that we were able to allow them to better police their communities, and this will be helpful in the area of local public safety.

The Unallotment...some observations

Norm Hanson

Michele Courmyea comments in her column on some technical aspects of budget unallotment by Governor Pawlenty. Some question whether the governor has the authority to make such large scale unallotments since such authority has been assumed (presumed?) to be used only in an emergency. Some leaders of our party and representatives of organizations affected by unallotments have proposed hollow claims challenging the governor regarding his use of the unallotment authority. As of this date, no formal legal challenges have been submitted nor is it likely that any will be. The governor can easily and justifiably claim an emergency situation faces the state and he had to act.

The posturing by these folks and groups reminds me of the posturing we witnessed a few months ago when the governor of a nearby midwest state appointed an individual to complete the unexpired term of former Senator Barack Obama. The majority leader of the U.S. Senate publicly stated he would not seat the newly appointed senator. The Illinois Secretary of State publicly

stated that he would not issue the necessary certificate for the newly appointed senator to take to Washington as proof of appointment.

As expected these public claims proved to be nothing more than puffery, chest pounding, and embarrassing silliness, confirmed by their inability to act. The then still seated Governor Blagojevich had the absolute constitutional authority to make the appointment on behalf of the citizens of Illinois and the two publicly boastful gentlemen could do nothing to stop the new senator from being seated. Both of these folks, especially, Majority Leader Harry Reid should have known better, and should not have put themselves up for public ridicule.

I hope that the DFL candidates for Minnesota governor in 2010 as well as other party and legislative leaders will make the legitimate case(s) to show the harm that will be done to the state by the governor's unallotment decisions. Unlike the two gentlemen noted above, I hope and expect our DFL leaders will make the case, for example, that cutting the GAMC program, is not good public policy. The people, who are no longer able to enroll in the GAMC program, will just show up for care in expensive emergency rooms, the cost of which will affect all of us directly or indirectly.

One potential gubernatorial candidate was reported as going to focus on jobs, jobs, and jobs, noting the obvious—people with jobs can buy houses, cars, appliances and so on that result in additional jobs. Given the nearly 10% rate of unemployment with more layoffs occurring everyday strongly suggests that the governor's claim that cutting taxes helps business does not work.

PCR Contributions April - June

Todd Anderson, Roseville
Lewis Anderson and Rachel Brown, Roseville
Lee Goderstad, Roseville
Joel Graf, Vadnais Heights
Gary Grefenberg, Roseville
John and Megan Hanna, Roseville
Chris and Audrey Hennington, Roseville
David Orcutt, St. Anthony
Janet and Frank Rog, Roseville
Robert and Llona Rouda, Roseville
Sam J. Rulli, Vadnais Heights
Ann Sisel, St. Paul
Paul and Jessica Winkelaar, Lauderdale
Anonymous, Roseville, St. Paul, St. Anthony (3)

We have to make the case to Democrats, moderate Republicans and Independents alike that the governor's imploding economy approach doesn't work. But we cannot just make boastful claims that our approach is better UNLESS we can show WHY our DFL approach will actually result in good, solid public policy options for all.

I want our leaders to avoid making hollow and foolish claims for the effectiveness of this or that public policy change, and see the recent events in Illinois and Washington as an example of how pure puffery, chest pounding and grandstanding are ineffective and end up in public ridicule.

I want our leaders to promote the rationale for good, solid DFL public policy options. How about you —any comments anyone?

SD54 Calendar—July 2009

Note: Mark your calendars now!!! Due to circumstances beyond our control, the U.S. Post Office may not always deliver the *Newsletter* in advance of the events scheduled. For speedy email delivery, please contact us at (651) 484-8926 or (651) 486-7120 and request to be put on our email list.

- July 16 Thursday Annual Picnic, Lion's Pavillion in Central Park, Roseville, 6:00 p.m.
Bring a dish to share and a non-perishable food item for the food shelf. We need
volunteers to grill the meat and someone with a truck to haul food drive donations
to the local food shelf.
- July 20 Monday 4CD Central Committee Meeting, Rice Street Library, 1911 Rice St., 7:00 p.m.
- August 6 Thursday Newsletter Planning Committee, Georgiana Sobola's home,
1961 Hamline Ave. N., Roseville, 7:00 p.m. *See "Attention Readers" below*
- August 20 Thursday SD54 Executiver Committee, Roseville City Hall complex (Room to be
announced). 7:00 p.m. All are welcome. Contact Michele Courneya (651) 484-3717

August 27-Sept. 7 State Fair Donut Booth.

We need 100 volunteers to work six-hour shifts during the State Fair this year.
Our dates are Friday, August 28, Monday August 31 and Friday, September 4.
Contact Audi Moffitt at (651) 917-3579 to volunteer.

- Sept. 17 Thursday SD54 Central Committee Meeting, Roseville City Hall Complex, 7:00 p.m.
Watch for signs. All are welcome.
- Sept. 26 Saturday DFL State Central Committee Meeting. Metro area location to be announced
- Sept. 26 Saturday Founders Day Dinner—more details on DFL website <www.dfl.org>

2010

- February. 2 Tuesday Precinct Caucuses for election of delegates to SD54 Convention and
submission of resolutions. Mark your calendar. To learn where your caucus convenes,
check with your city hall.

—*Attention Readers*—

The Newsletter Committee needs new members who are willing to learn how the newsletter is produced and to keep this valuable district asset going. We are looking for people in all positions. Contact Norm or Julianne to find out how you can become more involved. No experience necessary, just a willingness to be involved.

This newsletter is an important asset to SD54, but there are costs as well! You can help maintain this service and cut production costs by switching from paper copy to email copy. Please do so starting today. Contact Norm Hanson (651) 484-8926 or Julianne Johnston (651) 486-7120 to make this change.

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Come One—Come All
Annual Potluck Picnic — July 16, 2009

Roseville Central Park — Lion's Pavilion off Victoria Street
(East side of Bennett Lake)
6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m

It's time for our annual picnic! Welcome to all of our friends and families of SD54. It's our time to meet old friends and make new friends of the DFL. We will renew our efforts to elect Democrats to office and to prove once again that our SD54 is one of the best in the state. SD54 will provide a sufficient supply of brats and hotdogs and all the trimmings for everyone as well as plates and tableware and napkins. **Bring a dish to share if you can. We also welcome a non-perishable food donation for the food shelf.**

Once again we will invite elected officials, DFL organizations and our legislative representatives to the event so you will have a chance to meet with them and share your concerns and ideas.

We look forward to seeing you there!