



Senate District 54 DFL Newsletter

March 2009
Vol. 17 No. 5

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

What's New in SD54

Michele Courneya, Chair

The news is the same in SD54 as everywhere else—we need money. In addition to making up a shortfall anticipated for 2009 caused by fully funding our candidates for the 2008 elections, we need to be ready for 2010. In non-election years such as 2009, we need approximately \$10,000 to fund our newsletter, meetings, events, and basic operating costs. In election years such as 2010, we need an additional \$20,000: \$15,000 to provide the full \$5,000 donation for our three endorsed SD54 candidates (two for the state house and one for the senate) and approximately \$5,000 to pay for caucuses and a convention. With our costs increasing, due in large part to our increased membership base, and decline in donut booth revenue, we are embarking on a fundraising campaign. Our goal is to raise at least \$30,000 in 2009, and \$60,000 in all over 2009 and 2010. This will help keep SD54 strong, continue to build our base, recruit and develop a candidate pool so we have new candidates when we need them, and keep SD54 and Minnesota “true blue” Democratic areas.

While SD54 is not “too big to fail” or eligible for TARP, TALF, or other government bail out money, we are eligible for the Political Campaign Refund (PCR) program in Minnesota. Under the PCR, if you make a donation to a political party unit such as SD54 DFL, you are eligible for a refund from the state. The maximum amount you can contribute and receive a complete refund for is \$50 per individual or \$100 per married couple. When you donate to us, you are really making a short-term loan that will be paid back when you claim the PCR refund. Therefore, we are focusing our fundraising efforts on maximizing PCR donations. We have recruited several marvelous volunteers from each precinct in SD54, led by our fundraising “Tiger Team,” to call all the strong DFLers in SD54. Expect to hear from us asking for donations and pledges during the next few weeks. You may also hear from us by e-mail if we don't contact you directly by phone. Even though we outnumber them, using the PCR program Minnesota Republicans raised \$12,000,000 more from 2000 to 2007 than Minnesota DFLers. We must start claiming our fair share to get and keep Democrats in power and get this state's real needs met.

PCR is as easy as One-Two-Three

1. Donate \$50 or \$100

- *By credit card.* Go to www.sd54dfll.org, click on the *donate* button and follow the directions. We will be notified of your donation and mail you a receipt and the necessary form to claim your PCR refund.
- *By check.* If we call you and you make a pledge, we will send forms to you to collect the donation. If you want to request that a form be sent to you contact me at (651) 484-3717 or mcourneya@starfieldsmith.com. Fill in the information on the form you receive, including whether you'd like to be included on the list of donors we will publish in the newsletter and on the website. Be sure to sign the check and make it out to: *DFL – Senate District 54*. Send the check and form to us in the stamped return envelope provided.
- *In person.* You can also make a donation at any of our SD54 meetings or events and receive your receipt and claim form on the spot.

2. Wait for your EP-3 Receipt and PCR Refund Form.

These will come by mail from SD54, within a few days after we receive your check or a notice of your donation. Fill out the PCR Refund Form, attach the EP-3 Receipt, and mail them to the address shown on the PCR return envelope we provide. (Please add a stamp to help keep down mailing costs.) You can make only one claim for the PCR refund per calendar year, so make sure your receipts total \$50 or \$100 before you send the form into the state.

3. In a few weeks, the Minnesota Department of Revenue will send you a PCR refund check!

Or, you can have the refund directly deposited into your savings or checking account!

How to Help

In addition to donations, we can always use more volunteers. To help with calling, mailing, planning events, or anything else you can think of, contact: Andi Moffatt at andiandtom@comcast.net or (651) 917-3579; or Michele Courneya at mcourneya@starfieldsmith.com or (651) 484-3717.

Many thanks to Ivor Matz, associate chair; Andi Moffatt, secretary; Bob Venters, treasurer; Anita Mayfield, Finance Committee chair; Finance Committee members; Todd Anderson, Website management; Robin Ragnor, Webmaster; Tiger Team volunteers; and our volunteer callers.

My Inauguration Road Trip

Sue Rengstorf

Wow! I told myself I can't pass up this opportunity! I'm an adventurer by nature but I want it to be safe—and cheap. The idea of ordinary people from all over the country converging on our relatively small national capital for one momentous event was intriguing. When I learned someone I knew was organizing a trip to the inauguration which would be short and inexpensive, I jumped on the opportunity.

In November, Deb Madson from the DFL 4th District Central Committee researched and found someone from down south was organizing bus trips all over the country for travel to the inauguration. She invited a group of people she thought might be interested to go along. We were supposed to sign up early and find up to 60 people to join us, but it didn't work out that way. We had only 13 people and the on-line sign up deal didn't work, so Deb located a van to take us to Chicago. We left Monday morning, January 19, at 5:30 a.m. from the Rainbow parking lot in Woodbury—the original 13 of us from Minnesota, plus a

reporter from the *New York Times*. We squeezed into our large van and a member of our group drove. The highlight of the trip was a collection of interesting information from the inauguration website that someone had copied and brought along for us all to read.

We arrived in Chicago about 1:00 p.m. and met up with a large bus in a parking lot. Many on that bus knew Obama personally, had worked on his campaigns for many years, helping him get elected three times. Other people came from the Chicago area and a third bus carried people from all over the Midwest.

The highlight of the bus trip was listening to people talk about their involvement with the Obama campaign, and how they happened to come along on the trip. A recorder captured people's stories, and the *New York Times* reporter interviewed people for her blog. There was excitement and some apprehension. Not everyone who got on in Chicago understood that we had to leave all belongings on the bus, with no access to it. And I worried about whether everyone would make it back to the bus on time at the end of the day. (I know I am kind of a "mother hen.") We were all wondering what the day would bring.

We arrived in Washington DC about 6:00 a.m. and joined the masses of people at the Metrorail station trying to get to the inauguration site. It was a physically taxing day, standing in long lines without food or water for many hours after having had very little sleep on the bus. The most taxing was the bone-chilling cold that we endured for hours while being squashed among the three million people all doing the same thing. It was awesome.

Despite our not having a particularly good viewing spot and being cold and hungry, the highlight of that day in Washington was simply being there, experiencing the crowds and the atmosphere during the inauguration program itself. It was worse than annoying when people started pushing past us to leave during Obama's speech.

Afterwards we walked around, went to a museum, shopped at street vendors, rode the Metrorail to a Thai restaurant where we met the rest of our Minnesota group for dinner, and talked about our experiences. Then it was the Metrorail again back to the bus, which waited for us exactly where we left it. I was thrilled to meet the rest of our group at the end of the day to board the bus together.

We arrived home late Wednesday evening. It was wonderful to experience it all. I felt good about showing support for our new president. I wish you all could have been there too.

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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We Did Not Vote For a Black Man!

Julianne Johnston and Norm Hanson

We did not vote for a black man last November when we were among the millions who sent Barack Obama to the White House to become the 44th president. We did vote for a man who clearly understands and accepts as sacrosanct the values that have been such an important part of the Great American Experiment and the melting pot since our nation was founded. Values such as “hard work and honesty, courage and fair play, tolerance and curiosity and loyalty and patriotism” (from President Obama’s inaugural speech) are old but tried and true and have helped make America great.

Yes, we voted for Barack Obama because his views of America, including what it has been, what it is, and what it can be are a welcome and refreshing change from the values held by the administration of George Bush. America is the most powerful nation on earth but it requires intelligent and informed leadership to use the power appropriately. Using military power to go to war against a former ally for reasons quickly admitted to be invalid is an abuse of such power, no matter how good “striking back” might have made many of us feel after 9-11. Iraq did not pose a military threat to the United States, nor were any of the 9-11 terrorists from that country. We need to use our power as a nation more wisely and fittingly as part of the community of nations and not act as a lone wolf or a cowboy. President Obama understands our role in the community of nations as well as how really patriotic that is.

Yes, we voted for Barack Obama because he understands that the separation of church and state is the only way to assure that all citizens are free to worship in whatever manner that they choose including deciding not to worship at all. The president is very conservative on this issue as are we; that is, that the tenet of the separation of church and state is sacrosanct and should not be allowed to be eroded and is the only way to assure the freedom of religion for all citizens.

We are all citizens of the United States and, as such, we all should have the opportunity to share in the benefits as well as make the necessary sacrifices to keep the nation strong. That means that we climb above the fear, conflict, and discord of the past eight years and approach the serious issues that now confront us with a sense of hope and unity of purpose just like Americans have done since taking leave from England beginning at Lexington and Concord.

We voted for Barack Obama because he understands the importance of all of the above to what America is and what it can be. As the president, he will face many challenges from the other side of the aisle as well as from his own supporters. There will be many who supported Obama who will be disappointed that he does not push their agenda to the extent that they think he should. On the other hand, the values that he brought with him into the most important office in the world are the basic and good values that made America great and will keep us strong as a nation and as a people.

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—SD54 Legislators Report—

Senator John Marty
Minnesota Health Plan Will Improve Care and Save Money. Although we are devoting much of our time to addressing the state budget deficit, we need to work on other critical issues as well.

Health care is one major example. About 400,000 Minnesotans have no health insurance and at least a million more have insurance but still cannot afford to pay their medical bills due to high premiums, co-payments, deductibles, and care not covered by their insurance.

When people face high medical bills, they struggle to find ways to pay them. In many communities, local VFW or Legion clubs have fundraisers on many weekends to help cancer patients drowning in medical debt. Even so, health care expenses are now the cause of bankruptcies more than all other causes combined.

Many people simply cannot afford health insurance, even if their employer is paying some of the premiums, so they end up on Medical Assistance or Minnesota Care. For those who do not qualify for those programs, the final recourse is to use hospital emergency rooms—the most costly way to deliver health care.

As a result, the state's expenses for medical care are consuming an ever greater share of the state budget. With an aging population and high nursing home expenses, the future trend is not promising.

The state's massive budget deficit should be a wake-up call to the need for health care reform. We need to ensure that all people get the health care they need, and that we bring down health care costs.

To accomplish this, I am working on the Minnesota Health Plan, a single, statewide plan that would cover all Minnesotans' medical needs. Equally important, it would reduce the need for costly medical care through public health, education, prevention, and early intervention. Both Bev Scalze and Mindy Greiling are co-authors of the legislation in the House.

Under the plan, patients would be able to see the doctors of their choice when they need care, and their coverage by the health plan would not end when they lose their jobs or switch to new employers.

The Minnesota Health Plan would lower health care spending through prevention, efficiency, and the elimination of paperwork. Although it is not cheap, it is significantly less expensive than our current system and it would provide a full range of health care services to everyone, greatly improving the health of the population.

This legislation is gaining significant support. My legislation has passed both the Senate Health and Commerce committees. Although it may take three or four years to pass this groundbreaking legislation, it will significantly improve the health of Minnesotans and help address financial difficulties faced by individuals, businesses, and the state. *For more information:* mnhealthplan.org

Mindy Greiling, State Representative SD54A
New Minnesota Miracle Education Reform Will Stimulate Economy. Even in the face of a very large budget deficit, our State Economist Tom Stinson says that investing in education is wise. Productivity will stimulate our state's lagging economy, Stinson says, and education is the key to productivity. Unlike now, previous bad financial times did not hit Minnesota as hard as it did other states, because we invested in our students.

Now parents and teachers must spend their time and energy attempting to pass levy referenda that raise local property taxes, instead of spending time with students and their education. Districts that cannot pass referenda fall far behind in the quality of education they can offer their students. Equalization in current funding formulas has atrophied to the point it is often nonexistent, resulting in a playing field that is slanted sharply against property-poor districts.

Whether districts can raise property taxes or not, most have outdated textbooks, library materials, and technology; shrinking numbers of counselors, nurses, and other school support staff; less after-school activities and steep fees for things students used to enjoy free of charge. Low class sizes really matter for young children's education, and there is a limit to the number of older students that can be safely crammed into classrooms or that will benefit from science labs.

Education finance reform legislation I am authoring,

dubbed the *New Minnesota Miracle*, is the result of work by a broad-based education coalition called P.S. Minnesota. School district organizations of all types across the state strongly support the bill, as well as parent groups, the League of Women Voters, and many others. The bill's goal is to enable every student, regardless of zip code, to graduate from high school ready for success, whether a student's future is in college or university, technical school, or in a good job. We can no longer afford to settle for just some of our students accomplishing that goal. The bill simplifies education finance and provides innovative accountability for student achievement that measures progress in closing the achievement gap in exchange for equitable and need-based funding to provide all students a successful future.

The bill was heard in the House K-12 Education Finance Committee recently and received positive reviews from testifiers. A rural superintendent who labeled himself a fiscally conservative Republican said that education finance is in such a state that school districts are now eating their seed corn.

Even in the face of our state's financial difficulties, I strongly believe we must begin phasing in this important bill. The state of Maryland started down this path six years ago and has already cut its achievement gap by half. There is no time to waste, because, as Parents United says, children have no rewind.

Bev Scalze, State Representative 54B

Dedicated Funding Amendment. As the 2009 legislative session progresses, there are many projects being proposed to be funded by new sales tax money. This was a controversial amendment on the ballot in 2008. Most legislators didn't like to have to ask the voters for approval, but since state natural resource budgets were at the lowest level in 30 years, this was the only way to fund habitat and clean water. Fifty-six percent of the voters agreed, and the new sales tax will be levied beginning July 1, 2009 at the rate of three-eighths of one percent increase.

The money raised will be spent in the following manner: 33 percent to restore, protect, and enhance wetlands, prairies, forests and wildlife habitat; 33 percent to protect, enhance, and restore water quality in lakes, rivers, and streams; 14.25 percent to support parks and trails of regional or statewide significance; and 19.75 percent for arts, arts education, and to preserve Minnesota's history and cultural heritage. The total sales tax collected is projected to be \$237 million per year. It is estimated that over half of the sales tax will be generated in the metro area.

Even though the sales tax will not be levied until July of 2009, groups are proposing projects and "getting in line" for funding. Contrary to the stated thoughts of some of these groups, the legislature will have the final say on which projects will be funded. The groups can only recommend. The parks and trails portion can include metro regional parks (like Como Park) because those parks are actually state parks and will be eligible for funding.

The unique language in the amendment protects the new tax to "supplement traditional sources of funding for these purposes and may not be used as a substitute." We will be hearing the words "not supplant" a lot this year, because, for example, the governor's budget is proposing to severely cut some water and habitat programs in the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and Pollution Control Agency (PCA) budgets and add new sales tax money for those purposes. That is not allowed according to the constitutional amendment, and the legislature will need to be vigilant in protecting these new dollars to be used as the voters wished. In this difficult national recession, Minnesota was one of the few states in which voters raised their sales tax for these purposes. That shows how deeply we all respect our natural resources and cultural heritage.

— ***SD54 Legislators*** —

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Is It Over Yet—————?

Georgiana Sobola and Mary Jo Rourke

By the time this newsletter reaches you, we will probably still be involved in the Great Minnesota U.S. Senate Recount of 2008-2009. Will there be a decision on which of the 19 categories of rejected ballots will be counted? Will we know who's on first? Will absentee voters file a class action suit? The answers to these questions are yes, maybe, and only the lawyers know.

The big decider in this recount is the fate of thousands of rejected absentee ballots. As election judges, Mary Jo Rourke and I have a great deal of interest in the process, but expertise? Not so much. Therefore we repaired to Roseville City Hall where Carolyn Curti, elections administrator, supplied the expertise and guided us through the many pitfalls of absentee voting.

The process starts when a voter requests an absentee ballot and receives an application which asks for basic information: name, legal address, date of birth, signature, phone number, and mailing address if the application is to be sent to another address—Florida maybe? It also requires the voter to give a reason for requesting the ballot. Choices are limited, mainly absence from the precinct, illness, disability, or religious reasons. The number of requests for absentee ballots rose 17 percent in Roseville and surged nationwide as well. Clearly, quite a few voted by absentee ballot for convenience. Of the 3694 absentee ballots Roseville received, 90 were rejected; only one was for lack of a valid reason.

When applications are received, the search is on to determine if the voter is registered or not. The first reference, but least up-to-date list, is the local roster of registered voters. If the name is not found there, the county election officials' website is searched. The final website searched is from the Secretary of State's Office.

Registered voters receive a ballot (hopefully for the correct precinct), a brown ballot envelope A, and envelope B/C. Envelope B/C is one envelope printed on both sides (confusing and probably temporary), and a one-page instruction sheet. The voter selects a witness who must be a registered Minnesota voter and may be a spouse or relative, a notary public, or a person with the authority to administer oaths. The voter now marks the ballot in private, though the witness can help if needed. The ballot is placed into envelope A and sealed. The voter and witness now fill in the B side of the return envelope B/C by printing their names, addresses, and the date and signing their names. Ballot envelope A goes into the return envelope and it is sent to city hall. An agent may deliver the entire document for voters in hospitals, health care facilities, and residential facilities.

Unregistered voters receive a ballot, a brown ballot envelope A, a Minnesota registration application form, envelope B

for returning the registration form, return envelope C for returning the documents, and a two-page instruction sheet. The voter first fills out the voter registration form with the required personal information and proof of residence. It is signed and dated after the voter reads and assents to the eligibility requirements. The voter now marks the ballot. The witness may give assistance if needed. If errors are made, the ballot can be returned to city hall for a replacement. The ballot now goes into ballot envelope A and is sealed. The back of envelope B is filled in by the voter and the witness and signed. Ballot envelope A and ballot return envelope B go into the mailing envelope C, which is sent to city hall.

When the ballot and documents come to city hall, the information and signatures are compared with those on the application form and they are kept together. Whenever possible, election judges will call the voter for missing information and other problems so they can be corrected before election day. Security is very tight; all absentee ballots are kept behind two locked doors.

No doubt you have by now heard of places where errors can occur. Every step of the process is handled by fallible human beings, starting with the input of information into the computer. Of the 90 rejected ballots in Roseville, the largest category by far was "No Registration Card." Were they forgotten or put in the wrong envelope? Other problems were with signatures—missing or not matching. Quite a few were sent with the wrong precinct number. There were also witnessing problems, wrong materials sent, address problems, and one because of an out-of-state witness.

Minnesota Statute 203.B.12 Subd. 2 directs how absentee ballots are to be ruled "Accepted" or "Rejected." They are accepted if:

- The voter's name and address on the return envelope are the same as the information provided on the absentee ballot application;
- The voter's signature on the return envelope is the genuine signature of the individual who made the application for ballots and the certificate has been completed as prescribed in the directions for casting an absentee ballot except that if a person other than the voter applied for the absentee ballot under the applicable Minnesota rules, the signature is not required to match;
- The voter is registered and eligible to vote in the precinct or has included a properly completed voter registration application in the return envelope;
- The voter has not already voted at that election either in person or by absentee ballot. Failure to place the ballot within a security envelope is not a reason to reject an absentee ballot.

The recount of 2008-2009 has generated a great deal of interest in improving the absentee voting system. One idea suggested is to do away with absentee voting entirely and

SD54 Calendar March 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.

March 16	Monday	4CD Central Committee Meeting, Rice Street Library, 1011 Rice St., 7:00 p.m.
March 19	Thursday	SD54 Central Committee Meeting, Basswood Room in Fire Station #1, 2701 Lexington Ave. in the Roseville City Hall Complex, 7:00 p.m.
April 2	Thursday	Newsletter Planning Committee Meeting, Georgiana Sobola's home, 1961 Hamline Ave. N., Roseville, 7:00 p.m.
April 16	Thursday	SD 54 Executive Committee, Roseville City Hall Complex (room to be announced), 7:00 p.m.
May 18	Monday	4CD Central Committee Meeting, Rice Street Library, 1011 Rice St., 7:00p.m.
June 11	Thursday	SD54 Executive Committee Meeting, Roseville City Hall Complex (room to be announced), 7:00 p.m.
July 16	Thursday	Annual Picnic in Central Park in Roseville

—Attention Readers—

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. The Newsletter Committee needs new members who are

willing to learn how the newsletter is produced and to become critical members of the newsletter production committee to keep this valuable asset to the district going. We are looking for people in all positions. Contact Norm or Julianne to find out how you can become more involved. No experience required, just a willingness to be involved.

(Continued from page 6)

require everyone come to the polls on election day. This solution is not viable because it would disenfranchise citizens living abroad or in other states, military personnel, those with physical disabilities that make it difficult or impossible to leave their homes, and those in nursing homes.

Joining the 31 other states that already have early voting is gaining favor and is enthusiastically recommended by Secretary of State Mark Ritchie. There are several bills already being prepared in the legislature and there is plenty of experience to draw on from these other states. If a statewide bill for early voting does not pass this session, there is a plan for a bill to test early voting in five different community types: rural, urban, suburban, small city, and large city. Roseville will be the small city.

Mail voting is another option. This alternative is now used in Oregon. It would be a real boon in some of our sparsely populated counties in northern Minnesota where voters have to travel long distances to reach a polling place.

It is pretty clear that we will have legislation to streamline the absentee voting system. Some ideas are to eliminate the need for a witness, eliminate stating a reason for voting absentee, and issue each voter a Voter ID number to eliminate the need for a driver's license or other identification.

If changes are not made to the absentee voting process, we may face another occasion like the Great Minnesota U.S. Senate Recount of 2008-2009.

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SD54 Central Committee Forum Announcement

March 19, 2009 - 7:00 p.m.

The state budget crisis and what effect it will have
on Minnesota's resources and its people

*An interactive discussion with Senator John Marty
and Representatives Mindy Greiling and Bev Scalze*

**Roseville City Hall Complex (*Watch for signs for meeting location*)
2701 Lexington Avenue, Roseville**

All City of Roseville buildings are handicapped accessible

