



SENATE DISTRICT 66

DFL NEWSLETTER

February 2019

RAMSEY COUNTY NEWS

Excited to serve

by Commissioner Trista MatasCastillo

I was sworn into office in an emotional ceremony on January 8. It was a truly overwhelming moment as I took the oath to serve as your Ramsey County commissioner for District 3, which includes parts of Senate Districts 65 and 66. For those who may not yet be familiar with me, my name is Trista MatasCastillo. Before public office, I spent sixteen years in our nation's military (three branches: Navy, Marines, and Army National Guard) and then spent ten years as an advocate and lobbyist for affordable housing and veterans' issues with organizations such as Habitat for Humanity and the Minnesota Assistance Council for Veterans. I am also a seventeen-year user of county services on behalf of one of my sons, who is severely disabled and relies on Ramsey County for support.

After we were sworn in, we approved our committee assignments. I am excited to serve as the chair of the Human Services and Workforce Solutions Committee and vice-chair of the Housing and Redevelopment Authority. In these roles I am going to take a very active look at how we can deliver services more effectively and accessibly to ensure that people in Ramsey County can get the support they need with dignity.

It is important to know that each Ramsey County commissioner is a member of more than two dozen committees and boards and are involved in every decision we hear about from staff, community members, and other leaders regarding the work we are currently doing and how we can move forward. I plan on sharing my learning with you, so together we can bring the important county work to the forefront. For example: did you know that Ramsey County appoints a member to the National Association of Counties Health Steering Committee? I will be serving on this national board among others. A full list of committee assignments will be added to my county webpage soon.

There is a lot going on in District 3 and across the county. I hope to be able to highlight the work happening and spotlight some exciting updates over the next four years. Here are a few to share from our first week in office:

- Ramsey County conducted a study of its five municipal golf courses to evaluate their future prospects. That study was just released, and I'm still looking it over. But I'm committed to taking a hard look at how we're investing money, and to ensuring that we use our parks and natural resources to the greatest benefit of everyone in Ramsey County.

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Upcoming events

February 4, 6:30-8:30 p.m.
SD66 Central Committee

February 5, 7 p.m.
Roseville DFL Central Committee

March 4, 6:30-8:30 p.m.
SD66 Central Committee

March 10, 2:30 p.m. begin signing in 3 p.m. convene, about 5 p.m. adjourn
St. Paul DFL caucuses

April 1, 6:30 – 8:30 p.m.
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April 2, 7 p.m.
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May 18, 19
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See page 10 for full calendar.

(Continued on next page)

- Saint Paul will be constructing a trail along Como Avenue in 2020, part of its “Grand Round” loop around the city. Fun fact: Como, like many major streets in Saint Paul and Falcon Heights, is controlled by Ramsey County, in this case as County Road 75. There will be an open house for the project on Tuesday, January 15, from 4:30-6:30 p.m., at the Como Streetcar Station, 1224 Lexington Pkwy N.
- Mayor Lindstrom of Falcon Heights and I held an open house on Thursday, January 10, to hear from community members about how we can connect and improve services together. We are eager to collaborative to ensure Ramsey County works for all of us.

I’m excited to serve you and the people of Ramsey County. I don’t yet have an office but I hope to very soon, and I will always welcome anyone for a visit. In the meantime, I can be reached at Trista.Matascastillo@co.ramsey.mn.us or on my cell phone at (651) 341-0975.

New year, new roles

by Commissioner Mary Jo McGuire

In my role as a Ramsey County commissioner, I serve on a number of boards and committees where the county works alongside other local government partners to collaborate on issues important to our communities. Since taking office in January 2013, I have served as the board liaison to the Ramsey County Library Board and starting this year, I will also be serving on the Metropolitan Library Service Agency (MELSA) Board. I am honored to have been chosen to represent Ramsey County on these two committees since libraries are such a vital part of our communities and offer much more than just books to those who visit them.

We also recently welcomed Gwen Willems to the Ramsey County Library Board—she will be a fantastic addition to our team!

In other library news, Ramsey County Library has been recognized as a Library Journal Star Library for the sixth consecutive year—*one of four in Minnesota for 2018*. The Library Journal Index is a measurement tool that compares annual data reported to state library agencies and compiled by the Institute of Museum and Library Services. Libraries are rated on five measures: circulation, visits per capita, program attendance, public internet usage, and circulation of electronic materials.

Learn more about the Ramsey County Library at <https://www.rclreads.org/>.

What is MELSA?

The State of Minnesota is divided into twelve regions for the purpose of delivering library services. MELSA is the region that covers the seven-county metro area, and residents of the region can check out and return materials to any of the more than 100 public libraries in the seven-county area. This collaboration allows the member libraries to avoid duplication of efforts and resources and also expand the services we can offer to our residents.

Learn more at <http://www.melsa.org/>.



New DFL House Majority sets stage for results reflecting our values

by Rep. John Lesch

I'm grateful to the constituents of District 66B for giving me the honor to serve another two years in the Minnesota House of Representatives. Last year I heard from our community and those across the state loud and clear about their hunger for a new way of doing business at the Minnesota State Capitol.

Part of this "new way" is the DFL majority that voters put in charge of the Minnesota House of Representatives. Previously, under Republican control we saw very little get accomplished and what they did get done, largely benefited corporate special interests. With this new majority, working alongside Governor Walz and the senate (with a GOP majority of a single vote), I'm hopeful we can return the conversation at the capitol back to one rooted in our core values to deliver progress for Minnesotans.

What does that mean? We all want great schools in our communities, but we also want our nieces and nephews in the suburbs and greater Minnesota to be able to get a quality education, too.

We all want affordable, accessible health care for our families, but we want to make sure our neighbors can have that too, especially those with low incomes, seniors, and people with disabilities.

We want everyone to be able to get a good job, with fair compensation giving them a chance to prosper and have a legitimate sense of economic security. This might take the form of earned sick and safe time, paid family leave, or even strong protections against wage theft.

We deserve the ability to be safe wherever we are in a community, whether in school, the workplace, or a senior care facility—as a few examples—free of gun violence, sexual harassment, bullying, assault, theft, or abuse.

These are the values I hear folks want to see advance at the Minnesota State Capitol. We care about one another, and want everyone to have a good opportunity to be successful. Minnesotans expect results from their elected officials at all levels, and I look forward to contributing to this.

The new DFL majority means some other changes. Personally, I'll be embarking upon a new challenge this session as I become chair of the House Judiciary Finance and Civil Law Division. Several topics are under this committee's purview, mostly those related to the state's justice system including the Uniform Laws Commission, Specialty Courts, Board of Public Defense, and Guardians ad Litem.

All Minnesotans—no matter their demographic background, geographic location, or financial standing—deserve access to justice. Unfortunately, many folks face significant barriers to this. In this position, I'll work diligently to remove these barriers, and ensure the basic principle of fairness can be found both in our justice system and within the public policy we produce. Within this area, we have the potential to produce some positive solutions this session, and much of it I'm confident can be bipartisan, especially measures relating to personal data privacy and expanding Minnesotans' civil rights.

It's a great honor to serve our community, and I hope you'll remain in contact with me. Be sure to call me at the capitol at (651) 296-4224, email me at rep.john.lesch@house.mn, or hit [me up on Facebook](#) with what's on your mind. Or swing by my office at the State Office Building just across the street from the capitol and say hello.

I can't wait to see what we can accomplish working together this session.



Taxing politics in the 2019 Minnesota legislative session

by Prof. David A. Schultz

Editor's note: This article is reprinted with permission from the blog of Hamline University Prof. David A. Schultz, <http://schultzstake.blogspot.com/>.



Taxes are always a contentious issue in Minnesota politics. Who pays, how much, and for what purposes divides the DFL and Republican parties. The same will be true in the 2019 session. While the focus going into the session has been Governor Walz's plan to raise the gas tax to pay for long-term infrastructure maintenance to roads, bridges, and highways, four or five other taxes could shape the session and complicate the gas-tax debate.

First, one of the items left undone from the 2018 legislative session was changing Minnesota tax law to conform with federal changes in 2017. It was passed by the Republican legislature and vetoed by Gov. Dayton. The failure to pass tax conformity makes it more complicated by taxpayers to do their state taxes, but it also will cost them more if the state does not change its tax code. One estimate is that the failure to change the law will cost taxpayers nearly \$60 million; conversely, conformity potentially means less money coming into the state.

Second, the Minnesota Health Care Provider tax expires at the end of the year. It generates \$700 million annually, paying

for programs such as MinnesotaCare, the insurance for the working poor. Tim Walz and the DFL wish to renew it, Republicans view it as a "sick tax." Were this tax to expire it would leave a major hole in the state budget, complicating Democrat's plans to create a single-payer health-care law in the state.

Third, Minnesota, like every other state, has an infrastructure problem. There is insufficient money to pay for transportation infrastructure maintenance. Even though the Minnesota Constitution has language authorizing a gas tax, the revenues it generates are insufficient for the needs in the state. Simply put, we have more roads, bridges, and highways than ever, more people driving on them than ever before. Current revenues are not keeping pace with needs, therefore necessitating additional money.

The obvious revenue source is the gas tax. On the one hand, increasing the gas tax makes sense—it is sort of like a user fee on driving. The more you drive or use the roads the more of a fee or tax you pay. On the other hand, there are several problems with the gas tax. First, it is not directly a user fee on driving—it is really a carbon fuels fee that in theory acts to discourage people from polluting. Second, the gas tax is regressive, hurting people more heavily who are low-income and have to drive to work and may not have a mass transit alternative (including in rural areas). Third, as cars become more fuel efficient, the gas tax produces less revenue. Finally, increasing the gas tax is politically explosive. When it was last raised under Gov. Pawlenty and several Republicans voted for it, they were ousted from the party in primaries or elections. Gov. Dayton wanted a gas tax as part of a more permanent fix for Minnesota's infrastructure spending, but it went nowhere.

Enter Tim Walz. He too wants to fix and fund Minnesota's infrastructure deficit, looking at the gas tax as a possible solution. His cabinet appointments, such as Margaret Anderson Kelleher as MNDOT commissioner, point to this as a priority because she was the Speaker of the House when the last gas tax was adopted. But Republican opposition to a gas tax persists, and the illusionary \$1.5 billion budget surplus complicates any argument to raise taxes. Why, for Republicans, should we raise taxes when there is a surplus? Use it to pay for infrastructure.

This surplus is illusionary for several reasons. First, state law still factors in inflation for revenue projections but not obligations. This was the pact Tim Pawlenty and Roger Moe made in 2002 when they were in the legislature and running for governor and they wanted to deal with a budget deficit through cooking the state's books. Adjust for inflation, a lot of the surplus disappears. Second, part of the surplus must go into a rainy-day fund. Third, even at its full value, \$1.5 billion is barely three percent in a \$50+ state budget. Fourth, the surplus assumes status quo in terms of some revenue sources. For example, if the Health Care Provider tax were to expire it alone might cut into half of the projected surplus. Finally, as the recent state fiscal forecast pointed out, revenue estimates can change with a slowing economy projected to occur in 2020. The point is that the surplus really does not exist, but the belief that it does will harden opposition to a gas tax.

Yet there are three other potential taxes or sources of revenue out there that could serve as bargaining tools for infrastructure and much of the budget negotiations this year. First, last June 2018 the Supreme Court ruled in *South Dakota v. Wayfair* that states, including Minnesota, could require Internet and out-of-state businesses such as Amazon to collect sales or use taxes on purchases. While short term the windfall from Wayfair could be significant, short term it has not so far generated much. Nonetheless, Internet sales taxes open up one new revenue stream.

Second, another Supreme Court decision, *Murphy v. NCAA*, struck down a federal law preventing states from legalizing sports gambling. This decision opens the possibility for Minnesota to legalize a new revenue stream with potential large payoffs. However, tribal casinos, nonprofits (the latter who do charitable gambling), and the state lottery might oppose this.

Finally, Forbes magazine recently ran an article depicting Minnesota as one of a handful of states likely to legalize recreational marijuana. It is not clear that will happen and if so, what legalization will look like. But one possibility is also to allow for commercial sale. Commercial, if done as it has occurred in Colorado, too could be a source of tens of millions of dollars of new revenue. Whether there is a political coalition to support this option is unclear.

But given the options of Internet sales tax, sports betting, and marijuana taxes, their possibilities may complicate demands for a gas tax. One could also see strange options, with calls to legalize marijuana or sports betting and tax them to pay for infrastructure or replace the Health Care Provider tax. Or perhaps federal tax conformity—something more prized by Republicans perhaps, is traded for something else such as expansion of sports gaming, the gas tax, or the Health Care Provider tax. Perhaps trading tax options might build support, even among Republicans, for legalizing marijuana or supporting spending programs the Walz administration wants.

Sigurd F. Olson left a great conservation legacy

by Gwen Willems



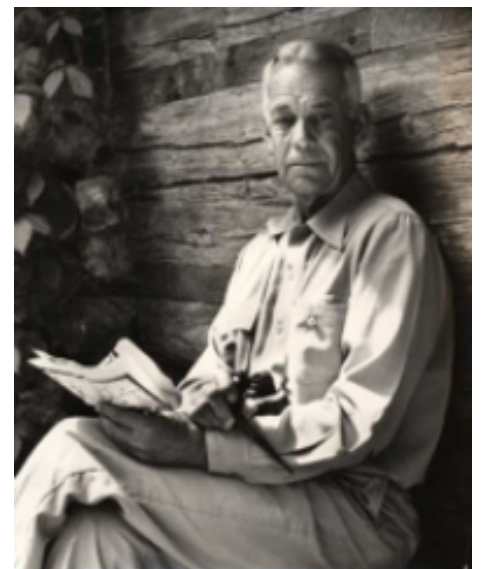
The news is full of troubling notes about Trump’s destructive proposals for our national parks and forests—allowing oil drilling, deforestation, uranium mining, budget cuts, power lines, a repeal of the Clean Water Rule, selling off lands, and more. In contrast, hearing and reading about Sigurd F. Olson is a good comfort and inspiration to keep doing all we can for the environment. He was a Minnesota author, teacher, environmentalist, and advocate who dedicated much of his time and energy to getting the Wilderness Act passed in 1964 and the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness in 1978. He contributed to the establishment of Voyageurs National Park in Minnesota, the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska, and the beautiful Point Reyes National Seashore in California, where I did the unforgettable steep descent to its lighthouse on a very windy day.

Thanks to Olson and other insightful and persistent advocates, today the National Wilderness Protection System covers 110 million acres in 44 states, 4.7 percent of all land in the United States. According to Kevin Proescholdt of Wilderness Watch, the Wilderness Act provides statutory protection for wilderness, defines wilderness as “an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain,” and requires common stewardship across agencies to protect “wilderness character.”

Despite vitriolic opposition—Olson was hung in effigy in Ely, Minnesota, his home for thirty years, where many blamed wilderness regulations for the poor local economy—he worked for wilderness protection for decades with many organizations and people, including some well-known ones. These include Theodore Roosevelt, Aldo Leopold, Hubert H. Humphrey, Stewart Udall, and Bruce Vento. Roosevelt’s biographer, historian Douglas Brinkley, called Roosevelt “the nation’s first conservation president” and quoted Roosevelt calling wilderness and wildlife America’s “heirlooms.”

Olson fell in love with the canoe country wilderness of northern Minnesota, the future Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW), on his first canoe trip in June 1921. His first published article, an account of a canoe expedition, appeared in the *Milwaukee Journal* the next month. In August 1921, he wed Elizabeth Dorothy Uhrenholdt, and they honeymooned on another canoe trip in the BWCAW. He worked as a canoe guide, purchased the business in 1929, studied agriculture, botany, geology, and ecology at Northland College, the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and the University of Illinois, earning a bachelor’s degree (1920) and later a master’s degree (1932), and taught biology at Ely Junior College, now Vermilion Community College. After chairing the science department and serving as dean, he resigned in 1947 to be a full-time writer and conservationist. He died at the age of 83 in 1982 from a heart attack while snowshoeing near home. Four years earlier one of Olson’s major goals was fulfilled when President Jimmy Carter granted full wilderness status to the BWCAW.

I first became familiar with Olson when working at the University of Minnesota Press, which reprinted his books with beautiful illustrations by Francis Lee Jaques, who also designed the famous dioramas for the Bell Museum of Natural History, now on the corner of Cleveland and Larpenteur avenues in Falcon Heights.



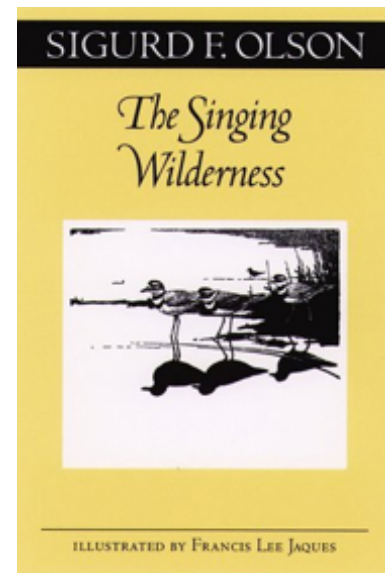
*Sigurd F. Olson sitting in front of his cabin.
Photo by Alfred Eisenstaedt.*

Olson believed wilderness provided important spiritual experiences, and he wrote eloquently of this philosophy in his nine books. This is a passage from his first book, *The Singing Wilderness* (1956):

The movement of a canoe is like a reed in the wind. Silence is part of it, and the sounds of lapping water, bird songs, and wind in the trees. It is part of the medium through which it floats, the sky, the water, the shores.... There is magic in the feel of a paddle and the movement of a canoe, a magic compounded of distance, adventure, solitude, and peace. The way of a canoe is the way of the wilderness, and a freedom almost forgotten.

Gwen is co-chair of the Capitol Region Watershed District Citizen Advisory Committee.

Thanks to Kevin Proescholdt of Wilderness Watch and the Minnesota Historical Society (MNHS) for information used in this article. The MNHS has archived many of Olson's book drafts, papers, correspondence, speeches, and other materials, including three audio files, at www2.mnhs.org/library/findaids/00316.xml. You can read more about the remarkable Olson in the book, *A Wilderness Within: The Life of Sigurd F. Olson*, by David Backes.



Chair's report

by SD66 DFL Chair Ryan Lee

2020 is already knocking on our door. The Democratic National Committee (DNC) announced the debate schedule for the presidential primaries, beginning in the summer of 2019. Candidates are beginning to declare their intentions to run. And the Minnesota Secretary of State has begun to share possibilities for how the primary might be conducted. All this as the DFL State Constitution Committee wraps up work on the 2019–2020 Call, the governing document for how senate districts like ours should time and run their caucuses and conventions. The preparations for 2020 are officially underway.

Everyone can remember the 2016 caucuses, in which Senate District 66 and Senate District 42 both swamped the Roseville High School. 2018 saw record turnout as well, with one of the highest attendance rates of a midterm election. Given the current political climate, we don't expect 2020 to be any different. Whether you're coming to support an issue through a resolution, to support a candidate by becoming a delegate, to catch up with neighbors and friends, or to get involved with your local party unit, we want you to be able to be there. Therefore, it's critical that we hear from DFLers like you to help us plan the best possible caucuses. To that end, we've created a survey to hear from neighbors like you, which you can fill out [online at this web page](#).

We're also dedicated to helping equip you with as much information as possible from the outset. Please stay tuned to our new website in the coming months to help you plan your visit to the caucuses. You can also subscribe to our social media channels on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#), and sign up to hear from the State DFL itself (use the "Sign Up for Updates" form [on the main page](#)).



Vice chair's report

by SD66 Vice Chair Katrina Lee



In December, our SD66 delegation traveled to Mankato for the final State Central Committee (SCC) meeting of 2018. Primarily, we were there to vote on the FY 2019 operating budget, which passed, and additions to the DFL action agenda, including the following seven items:

Civil, Constitutional, and Human Rights

- DFL supports the Sovereignty of our Tribal Nations and their Citizens.
- DFL supports personnel policies that are inclusive and accommodating of all Minnesotans who desire to serve their state and country in the Minnesota National Guard, regardless of gender identity or HIV status. We urge the Governor to use the power as Commander-in-Chief to implement such policies.

Labor and Employment

- DFL opposes all attempts by the Minnesota Legislature to eliminate or reduce prevailing wage rates in the State of Minnesota.
- DFL supports the protection of the freedom of all working people to come together in union and negotiate a fair return for their work, a right threatened by any anti-union legislation.

Natural Resources and the Environment

- DFL opposes subsidies, tax incentives, or regulatory reductions for sulfide mining or other mining that may have a more severe impact on climate than recycling existing materials.

Public Safety and Crime Prevention

- DFL supports banning cash bail on non-violent misdemeanors.

Retirement Security

- DFL supports restoration of operational funding for the Social Security Administration to at least pre Fiscal Year 2012 levels, adjusting for inflation and increasing demand, and should increase to compensate for inflation and demand each year thereafter.

Party Chair Ken Martin shared with us a post-election presentation that highlighted the record turnout (2.6 million Minnesotans cast ballots in 2018, compared to 2.9 who voted in 2016!) and how we won back more than half of the nineteen counties Trump flipped from Obama. Democrats made great gains in electing women and other candidates from underrepresented groups across the country. Winning will continue to require a balanced approach—we can't afford to ignore the rising Democratic electorate (youth, women, minorities, LGBTQ+) or rural working-class voters. In March, we'll be reconvening the SCC to elect our chair. If you have any thoughts concerning the direction of the state party, please reach out to me at katrinajadelee@gmail.com.

After many months, the new SD66 DFL website, sd66-dfl.org, is now live! You can also reach it from the original address, sd66-dfl.org. Our new website is part of our overall push to be more accessible for and engaged with our DFL neighbors. The website lists a calendar of upcoming events, our body's constitution, maps of our district and precinct boundaries, as well as resources for new voters, caucus-goers, and delegates—and more. Currently, we are gathering feedback from DFL neighbors like you on how to make the 2020 caucus and convention a success, so please visit <http://sd66-dfl.org/?s=survey> to fill out a quick survey.

The communications committee is also looking for volunteers who would be interested in contributing news articles, opinion pieces, or posts about other local interests. Please use the [contact form](#) on our website if you would like to write for the website or help maintain it, or if you have any ideas for additions to the website. I'm happy to teach anyone interested in how to use the WordPress content management system that underpins the website, which is a valuable career skill in today's job market.

Finally, thanks again for all your hard work in 2018—we couldn't have kept Minnesota blue without you!

CALENDAR

February 4, 6:30-8:30 p.m. - SD66 Central Committee

New Life Presbyterian Church
965 Larpenteur Avenue West, Roseville 55113

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Visit our website at <http://www.dfl-sd66.org/> for calendar updates.

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The *Senate District 66 DFL Newsletter* is published four times a year to inform and educate all interested parties in the activities and issues of SD66 DFLers including elected officials and endorsed candidates.

Please contact the editor if you are interested in joining the newsletter committee or submitting an article for publication.

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