

VIEW FROM THE CAPITOL

What have we learned from the COVID-19 experience?

by Rep. Alice Hausman

This is one of my favorite Facebook postings of the past few weeks:

Nothing should go back to normal.
 Normal wasn't working.
 If we go back to the way things were,
 we will have lost the lesson.
 May we rise up and do better.



Right now we are surely all hoping this will all be over soon. But should we go back to normal? Normal meant not everyone had healthcare assured. Normal meant income inequality for many. Many struggled with food insecurity. Housing stability evaded many. Homelessness was growing. And during the pandemic, all of those individuals suffered.

As the pandemic hit, employees in restaurants, bars, and retail establishments were among the first to lose their jobs. We know something about the wage levels of those employees. They were likely a paycheck away from not being able to pay their bills. As I write this, nearly 400,000 Minnesotans have applied for unemployment insurance since this all began. Systems are overburdened. Phones are not being answered.

So what have we learned? We need universal healthcare. Everyone should be getting the care they need. That is the only way we can assure that all Minnesotans are safe.

We should absolutely fund rental assistance before this session ends. We cannot allow those who lost their jobs to face a debt for unpaid rent that they can never repay. Eviction leads to homelessness.

And then we need to redouble our efforts for healthcare for everyone that is not tied to whether they have a job that provides it. We need to work to assure that workers are paid a living wage, that their rights are protected.

We learned one other thing. It is more difficult to talk about because we don't want to acknowledge that we noticed something good, an improvement. When there were fewer cars, when human activity slowed down, skies were bluer. That was particularly true in countries plagued by haze. Climate-change skeptics have challenged the assumption that human activity was a cause. They argued that it was naturally caused. But when humans changed the way they lived, the skies cleared. Will we go back or will we learn?

If we go back to the way things were, we will have lost the lesson. May we rise up and do better.

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Upcoming events

Until Monday, May 4
SD66 Convention Balloting

Monday, May 11
5:00 p.m. SD66 Results Sent to CD4
6:00-8:00 p.m. CD4 Executive Meeting

Thursday, May 14, to Saturday, May 23
CD4 Convention Balloting

Monday, June 1, 6:30-8:30 p.m.
SD66 DFL Central Committee Meeting

Tuesday, June 2, 7:00-8:30 p.m.
Roseville DFL Central Committee Meeting

Tuesday, June 16, 6:30-8:30 p.m.
SD66 DFL Virtual Happy Hour

Monday, July 6, 6:30-8:30 p.m.
SD66 DFL Central Committee Meeting

Tuesday, July 7, 7:00-8:30 p.m.
Roseville DFL Central Committee Meeting

See page 9 for full calendar.

COVID-19 is challenging Minnesotans

by Rep. John Lesch



Undoubtedly, the COVID-19 pandemic has altered the course of our day-to-day lives in ways both big and small. It has presented a healthcare crisis unlike anything most of us have ever seen in our lives. With Gov. Walz's stay at home order and other measures to protect our health and safety, business closures which have led to economic pain, and distance learning for our students, we've all had to adapt to a new normal, if only temporarily.

For the Minnesota Legislature, this has meant significant, unprecedented changes. House DFLers entered the legislative session with a bold agenda to enact earned sick and safe time, paid family leave, gun violence prevention measures, solutions to address climate change and other priorities rooted in Minnesota values. When the pandemic emerged, no matter the critical importance of these issues, out of necessity our focus immediately shifted to our COVID-19 response. Remarkably, the Minnesota House adapted to a system whereby action could be taken in remote committee hearings and even remote voting on the Minnesota

House Floor.

While this crisis has led to headaches and changes to things like legislative operations, nothing compares to the public health emergency that COVID-19 has presented at its core. Minnesotans have gotten ill, been admitted to the hospital, and tragically have died. Between the time this is written and the time this is published, all of these metrics will likely have increased significantly. Still, our state's response to this pandemic from a public health perspective has been exceptional.

We're blessed to have a world-class disease surveillance system in place and along with research at the U of M and Mayo Clinic, Minnesota has led the way in fighting this illness. With examples like greater testing capacity, development of cheaper ventilators, and research on potential treatments, work performed in Minnesota has saved lives. I'm proud the legislature quickly acted in a bipartisan fashion to deliver investments both for our public-health response and to ensure healthcare providers are able to deliver care for Minnesotans when they need it.

In addition to the dire medical consequences, there have been harmful economic impacts to businesses and families. The governor had to make several urgent and very difficult decisions to protect the health and safety of Minnesotans to stop the spread of the disease. As a result, many in our communities experienced wage and salary cuts, have been furloughed, or have been laid off. These individuals are now struggling deeply due to no fault of their own. I'm grateful the governor and lawmakers took steps like quicker access to unemployment insurance, a moratorium on evictions, a prohibition on price gouging of consumer goods, and a COVID-19 workers' compensation presumption for frontline workers.

This crisis has illustrated a major takeaway many of us have been working to address for a long time, but everyone needs to recognize: there are systemic inequities throughout our society. People in low-wage jobs—especially in the service industry, renters, single parents, and those without sick time or paid leave are impacted especially hard. For years, I've championed solutions to help Minnesotans move out of poverty, like earned sick and safe time and policy changes regarding fines, fees, and drivers' license suspensions to ensure more folks can get a break. I hope that once we move beyond this pandemic, we can all commit to thoughtfully and intentionally removing barriers to economic security for all Minnesotans.

We don't know how long this pandemic will impact us. It's extremely likely our summer activities—the time many of us savor as Minnesotans with friends and family—will be altered. Some would say Minnesotans are stubborn. I'd say they are resilient. By continuing to follow personal hygiene and social distancing guidelines, we will move beyond this crisis together. Please continue to take care of yourself and your family.

Coronavirus crisis shows need for fundamental reform of healthcare

by Sen. John Marty



The coronavirus crisis illustrates how ill-prepared our society is to address unexpected challenges. The housing crisis (*which has long been a crisis for many*) leaves homeless people highly vulnerable to getting and spreading the virus, either because of cramped conditions in shelters or from living on the street. The healthcare crisis (*which also has long been a crisis for many*) leaves many without access to treatment and harms others who don't get treatment because of the cost.

The coronavirus did not create our housing, healthcare, and poverty problems. It simply made existing problems worse. In addition, the crisis exposed these problems to those who were insensitive or even unaware of them.

In healthcare, this has pushed even conservative Republicans to recognize that it is in our interest for *everyone* to have healthcare. As a *New York Times* columnist wrote, Republicans now favor "Medicare for All, *but just for this one disease.*"

Both state and federal Republican officeholders favor free COVID-19 testing for everyone, including the uninsured. And some Republicans appear to be open to reimbursing hospitals for care they provide to uninsured or undocumented people. They finally seem to understand what we have been saying for years—that everyone is at risk if we don't treat parts of the population for infectious diseases.

This newfound interest in progressive social policy goes beyond healthcare: Paid sick leave for all workers? There was virtually unanimous opposition from Republicans in the legislature and from the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce. Now, even the Trump administration praises the concept: "If you are sick, stay home. You're not going to miss a paycheck," Mike Pence said in March, talking about how they were going to make sure people have paid sick leave.

But it is healthcare where the costly, dysfunctional system is most clearly highlighted. In the United States, we put a third of our healthcare dollars into a byzantine administrative system, which is supposed to make sure we don't pay for unnecessary care. However, this ends up costing double what other countries spend on healthcare per person, while leaving many people without coverage.

The pandemic exposes several major flaws in our health system:

- People who lack coverage don't seek care when they should, because of cost. Copayments and deductibles are good at reducing the amount of healthcare people get, by placing barriers between them and the care they need. The pandemic shows why it is a bad idea to have those barriers.
- Nobody oversees planning and coordination of services. Too many specialists, not enough general practitioners? Nobody's in charge of offering incentives to address the imbalance. Too few doctors in rural communities? No one is addressing that either. With a logical, organized healthcare system, we can plan to make services available when and where needed.
- Profitability drives our system, not public health. Hospitals compete with other hospitals for limited personal protective equipment (PPE). States compete with other states and the federal government to procure urgently needed supplies. One governor compared the current procurement of PPE, test kits, and ventilators to "a bidding war on eBay." Montana says it was outbid by the federal government. Arkansas was trying to purchase 500 ventilators when another state beat them, offering twice as much. Middlemen are profiteering off the pandemic. While Attorney General Ellison and Gov. Walz have appropriately made price-gouging a crime during the emergency, suppliers around the country are price-gouging on a massive scale—legally.
- The paperwork generated by our insurance, billing, and payment systems impede medical providers from their efforts to deliver care. Doctors and nurses spend time that should be spent on treatment, getting prior authorizations from insurance companies. Instead of simply treating patients, hospitals must track each expense and tie it to a specific patient so they can bill that patient and their health plan.

A commonsense universal healthcare system doesn't prevent people from getting sick; it cannot prevent a new pandemic. But it does coordinate healthcare providers, enabling the system to be better prepared, and to respond faster and more efficiently in preventing and treating illness.

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Our proposed Minnesota Health Plan (MHP) would address these problems the crisis exposed:

- Covering everyone, for all their medical needs, including dental, mental health, long-term care, vision and hearing, substance abuse treatment—all medical needs. And the MHP would do so without co-pays or deductibles, so there are no financial barriers to getting care.
- Coordinating and planning to ensure the system can meet healthcare needs. The MHP would provide incentives to get providers into underserved communities and to get medical students to choose primary care and specialties where there are shortages. It would plan to ensure there are sufficient supplies and services available so that we don't have these serious problems with shortages of PPE. By coordinating the distribution of supplies we would help hospitals work together instead of competing over supplies.
- Removing the profit motive from medical decision-making. Rural hospitals would be available to meet local healthcare needs, not be closed because they didn't fit a health system's corporate business plan. Through its unified price negotiations, the MHP would stop the bidding wars between hospitals and prevent price gouging.
- Eliminating the bureaucratic insurance system that interferes with care and drives up costs. The MHP would end the insurance company "prior authorization" interference, leaving medical decisions to doctors and their patients. It would lead to enormous savings of time and money for all medical providers, allowing them to deliver better care at less cost.

We may still be early in the trajectory of the coronavirus spread, but it has long been clear that our health system has problems. We spend double what other countries spend yet have worse outcomes. Before the pandemic started, one in three people didn't get care they need because of the cost, even if they had insurance.

Prior to the COVID-19 crisis, about half of Democratic politicians and virtually all Republicans opposed a unified, single-payer universal healthcare system, despite public support. I'm not optimistic that the Republican attitude of support for *Medicare for All*, **but just for the Coronavirus** will continue or translate to support for a *Medicare for All System*. But perhaps we can move Democrats who have been too scared or cautious. If our party will fully embrace it, we can achieve healthcare for all in the next three to five years.

Dear DFL friends:

These are difficult times for all—extremely difficult and challenging for healthcare workers, grocers, childcare providers, and others most exposed to the coronavirus. Please take care to practice social isolation, hand sanitation, and other practices experts recommend. Do it for your sake and for the sake of those who are most vulnerable and those most exposed.

We are all in this together. Take care,

John

Thank you for all you're doing

by Commissioner Mary Jo McGuire



I want to start by thanking all of the volunteers who worked hard to make the 2020 caucus and convention process happen. While we were no longer able to gather in person for our endorsing convention, I am happy that the DFL was able to establish a way for us to still participate in this important party process as we are all dealing with our new reality of staying home. Many thanks to those of you who were delegates and alternates to the Senate District 66 Convention.

Ramsey County has been playing a crucial role in our community's response to COVID-19, and I am proud of the work that staff members have been doing to make sure that we are maintaining crucial county services and serving our residents. Specifically, we are working hard to make sure that residents have access to food, shelter, jobs, and public health services. We are working with regional partners and the state legislatures to help renters and small businesses weather this time and looking ahead for opportunities for jobs and economic development to help our communities

recover once we are able to return safely to work.

At the time of the writing of this article, we were still under a stay at home order, in order to stop the spread of this virus. We all play an important role in helping flatten the curve, so I urge everyone to stay at home as much as your job will allow, don't go to work when you're sick, wash your hands, and cover your cough. I also encourage you to take time for self-care and get outside for a walk when possible (while still staying six feet apart from others)!

While you are staying at home, it is the perfect time to respond to the 2020 census and make sure your household is counted (If you haven't already filled it out)! A complete and accurate count is necessary for equal political representation, fair distribution of federal and state funding, and sound planning and investment in infrastructure, real estate, business development, and public policy. It only takes five minutes and can be done online. Go to www.2020census.gov/ and complete the survey today! Thank you so much!

Please do not hesitate to reach out to me with any questions you may have at maryjo@mcguireforcountyboard.org and visit my website at mcguireforcountyboard.org for more information about ways to help support me and my campaign through November. We will need to find new and unique ways to campaign—but know that together we will be able to connect with voters while respecting social distancing and staying at home. Thank you for doing all you can in this effort!

Also, if you are interested in learning about my county work, please visit my official website at ramseycounty.us/district2 and sign up for my newsletter.

Ramsey County responds to the crisis

by Commissioner Trista MatasCastillo



The COVID-19 pandemic has very quickly transformed life here in Minnesota as it has around the world. On the Ramsey County Board of Commissioners, we have focused on making sure that the essential services provided by the county are able to function safely as this crisis and the public health response continues. Our staff members have developed reimagined service delivery models that have been in place since before the stay at home order began and continue to improve. From financial assistance services to the Ramsey County Libraries, our departments continue to deliver services while minimizing the potential transmission risk for our employees and those receiving services.

For more information on how to receive Ramsey County services during this crisis, visit [our new COVID-19 website](#). **Most requests for service should start with a call to our hotline at 651-266-8500.** If you are already receiving services, call or email your case manager with any questions or problems. Library materials are also available to be picked up at several of our suburban libraries.

As of March 17, the County Board Office at the Ramsey County Courthouse was closed to the public, and all staff are working remotely whenever possible. **My office and I will continue to be available for meetings or to assist you with any questions or problems you have.**

My office phone number, (651) 266-8360, still works, and will go directly to my cell phone. To schedule phone or Skype meetings, please contact my Administrative Secretary Kim Burbach at Kim.Burbach@co.ramsey.mn.us. For assistance with county programs or information, contact my Assistant Ethan Osten at Ethan.Osten@co.ramsey.mn.us or by phone at (651) 266-8378.

In this crisis I have been one of the board's representatives to the COVID-19 Policy Action Group which brought together leaders from all levels of Ramsey County government to figure out responses to emerging issues. I have chaired our efforts around homelessness, especially keeping in mind the difficulty or impossibility of maintaining social distancing in the congregate shelters we have relied on. We are also seeing significant increases in the number of people sleeping outside and are working to do what we can to help them stay safe.

As always, I am available via phone and online for any questions or concerns you may have.

Honor the 50th Earth Day—get involved!

by Gwen Willems



In the midst of a global pandemic, it is hard to keep a focus on environmentalism, but it is needed more than ever when the president is eliminating EPA guidelines, discontinuing enforcement of environmental laws, allowing more auto emissions, selling public lands, granting oil and gas drilling lease auctions for public lands, and making enormous tax giveaways to big oil companies. *A New York Times analysis* (December 21, 2019), based on research from Harvard Law School, Columbia Law School, and other sources, counted 90 environmental rules and regulations that President Trump has eliminated in his first three years in office, rolling back Obama's conservation legacy.

A two-hour conversation between Denis Hayes, a graduate student at Harvard, and Gaylord Nelson, a U.S. Senator from Wisconsin, led to the first Earth Day on April 22, 1970. Twenty million Americans—10 percent of the U.S. population at the time—took part in demonstrations, marches, environmental clean-ups, and many other activities.

The resulting action from the federal government was extraordinary—passage of the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, and the Endangered Species Act, and the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency.

The theme for Earth Day 2020 was climate action. Ironically, human inactivity due to COVID-19 has had a dramatic positive impact on climate, reducing air pollution worldwide. Climate change represents the biggest challenge to the future of humanity and the life-support systems that make our world habitable, but also offers opportunities for action.



Unfortunately, due to COVID-19 and social distancing last month, many typical annual Earth Day events did not happen at local places such as the Harriet Alexander Nature Center in Roseville and the Como Zoo and Conservatory in St. Paul. Instead, what can we do to follow up while we are sheltering in place? One choice is to find an environmental organization that fits your passion.

Many organizations are doing significant work on climate change in addition to other goals. From home, you can visit websites to educate yourself about what groups are doing, connect locally, and sign up as a member. Some of the exceptional organizations I follow and appreciate are:

Sierra Club (www.sierraclub.org). With 3.8 million members and history going back to 1892, the Sierra Club is the most enduring and influential grassroots environmental organization in the United States. Its tag lines state that the Sierra Club champions solutions to the climate crisis; works for clean air, safe water, land protection, and a vibrant natural world; fights for environmental and social justice; and believes in getting people outside to enjoy the outdoors. The North Star chapter in Minnesota holds local outings and welcomes activity in their committees and board.

National Audubon Society (www.audubon.org). Audubon's mission is to protect birds and the places they need, today and tomorrow. It's a great choice if you're a bird watcher who wants to help conserve and restore natural ecosystems, focusing on birds and their habitats, for the benefit of humanity and the earth's biological diversity. There is a Minnesota branch, and the St. Paul chapter holds talks in the cooler months at the Fairview Community Center in Roseville and sponsors field trips in the warmer months. The St. Paul chapter's electronic newsletter is *The Cardinal*.

Minnesota Land Trust (www.mnland.org). With offices in Minneapolis and Duluth, this nonprofit has worked with landowners and local communities since 1993 to protect tens of thousands of acres and hundreds of miles of shoreline on Minnesota's lakes, rivers, streams, and wetlands from future development. More than 80 percent of Minnesota land is currently in private ownership so it is vital that the Minnesota Land Trust work together with owners to protect land they love and consider special, give back to local communities, and create legacies. Once the COVID-19 restrictions are done, the Trust will again be offering many opportunities for volunteers.

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World Wildlife Fund (WWF) (www.worldwildlife.org). The WWF works to conserve nature and reduce pressing threats to the diversity of life on Earth, with emphasis on food, climate, freshwater, wildlife, forests, and oceans. Based in Washington, DC, the WWF is well-known for protection of endangered species and their habitats. With 6,000 staff members, eight million activists, and 100 countries, it can focus on several campaigns simultaneously. WWF is currently urging its members to protect tigers and the Arctic Refuge, tell Congress we need a 100 percent clean economy, and fight plastic pollution, among other activities.

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) (www.nature.org). The Nature Conservancy has more than a million members and 400 scientists on staff, and protects habitats in all 50 U.S. states and more than 79 countries and territories. Since its founding in 1951, TNC has protected more than 125 million acres of land and thousands of miles of rivers worldwide. To conserve land and water, The Nature Conservancy works with governments, partner organizations, and others. Each state has a local TNC chapter with volunteer activities. Minnesota's is based in downtown Minneapolis.

Friends of the Earth (www.foe.org). Based in Washington, DC, the organization is one of the largest environmental networks, with more than 70 national member groups and 5,000 local activist groups on all continents. Friends of the Earth has supported campaigns in climate change, forests, fair trade, proper use of taxes, and the banning of genetically-modified organisms. They promote biodiversity, environmental rights, and repayment of ecological debt by rich countries to those that they have exploited.

Conservation Minnesota (www.conservationminnesota.org). Conservation Minnesota brings people together to focus on North Star state values: working together, building healthy and prosperous communities, and stewarding lakes and outdoors. Recent priorities are (1) 100 percent clean energy (Clean Energy First and the Energy Conservation Optimization Act), (2) local transportation solutions (funding local innovation and cost savings), (3) clean water (Clean Water 2050 legislation, water infrastructure investments, using general obligation bonds to fund the Environment and Natural Resource Trust Fund, pass the Salt Bill, honestly label disposable wipes), and (4) protection of people and wildlife (phase out lead ammunition and protect pollinators).

Environmental Defense Fund (EDF) (www.edf.org). The Environmental Defense Fund focuses on ecological issues that affect people worldwide: clean energy, sustainable fishing, restoring ecosystems, and health through reduced exposure to pollution. EDF uses a multidisciplinary approach to environmental problems, based on its strengths, and avoids duplicating efforts. Today, the organization has 2.5 million members and a staff of several hundred scientists, policy experts, economists, and professionals. EDF encourages supporters take action by voting and contacting policy leaders on their website.

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



*The North Shore of Lake Superior.
Photo by the author.*

CALENDAR

SD66 DFL will be holding its meetings remotely until further notice. Zoom links and instructions will be posted at sd66-dfl.org prior to the meeting dates. See <https://zoom.us/>

Until Monday, May 4

SD66 Convention Balloting

Monday, May 11

5:00 p.m. SD66 Results Sent to CD4

6:00-8:00 p.m. CD4 Executive Meeting

Thursday, May 14, to Saturday, May 23

CD4 Convention Balloting

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SD66 DFL Central Committee Meeting

Tuesday, June 2, 7:00-8:30 p.m.

Roseville DFL Central Committee Meeting

Tuesday, June 16, 6:30-8:30 p.m.

SD66 DFL Virtual Happy Hour

Monday, July 6, 6:30-8:30 p.m.

SD66 DFL Central Committee Meeting

Tuesday, July 7, 7:00-8:30 p.m.

Roseville DFL Central Committee Meeting

Tuesday, July 21, 6:30-8:30 p.m.

SD66 DFL Happy Hour

Tuesday, July 7, 7:00-8:30 p.m.

Roseville DFL Central Committee Meeting

Tuesday, July 21, 6:30-8:30 p.m.

SD66 DFL Happy Hour

Monday, August 3, 6:30-8:30 p.m.

SD66 DFL Central Committee Meeting

Tuesday, August 4, 7:00-8:30 p.m.

Roseville DFL Central Committee Meeting

Tuesday, August 18, 6:30-8:30 p.m.

SD66 DFL Happy Hour

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

Elected officials

Sen. John Marty

(651) 296-5645

jmarty@senate.mn

Rep. Alice Hausman

(651) 296-3824

rep.alice.hausman@house.mn

Rep. John Lesch

(651) 296-4224

rep.john.lesch@house.mn

County Commissioner

Mary Jo McGuire - Dist. 2

(651) 266-8356

maryjo.mcguire@co.ramsey.mn.us

County Commissioner

Trista MatasCastillo - Dist. 3

(651) 266-8360

trista.matascastillo@co.ramsey.mn.us

DFL contacts

City of Roseville DFL

Lauren Peterson, Chair

lrpeterson8@gmail.com

Senate District 66 DFL

Ryan Lee, Chair

(507) 298-0455

chair66@df1-sd66.org

Katrina Lee, Vice Chair

katrinajadelee@gmail.com

City of St. Paul DFL

Libby Kantner, Chair

(612) 860-7823

libbykantner28@gmail.com

Ramsey County DFL

Michael Bearfoot, Chair

(573) 612-1337

ecogeek@gmail.com

4th District DFL

Jen Guertin, Chair

(651) 747-5651

jenguertin919@gmail.com

Minnesota State DFL

Ken Martin, Chair

(651) 293-1200

chair@df1.org

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.

Newsletter committee

Editor: Gwen Willems (651) 646-8854

Designer: Edwin Beylerian

Committee Members: Judy Berglund, Katrina Lee,
Ryan Lee, Charlie Quick, Gwen Willems