



SPECIAL REPORT

The Minnesota Miracle should serve as a model

by Gwen Willems

The remarkable achievements of the 2023 Minnesota Legislature were widely recognized. E.J. Dionne Jr. wrote a column for *The Washington Post* (June 4, 2023) titled “The ‘Minnesota Miracle’ should serve as a model for Democrats.” Read all about it [here](#). Dionne is a professor of public policy at Georgetown University and a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution.

A few days later (June 7, 2023), Al Franken emailed about “a staggering list of accomplishments by the Democratic Farmer Labor party this session in the Minnesota state legislature and signed by our DFL Governor Tim Walz.” Franken made a list of these successes:

- Abortion rights
- [Paid family and medical leave](#)
- Sick leave
- Transgender rights protections
- Drivers’ licenses for undocumented residents
- [The restoration of voting rights](#) for people when they are released from prison
- Wider voting access
- A tax credit aimed at low-income parents with kids
- A \$1 billion [investment in affordable housing](#) including rental assistance
- Universal background checks for firearms sales, including private gun transfers
- [A red-flag warning system](#) to take guns from people deemed a threat to themselves or others
- A ban on conversion therapy for LGBTQ people
- [Legalization of recreational marijuana](#)
- An expansion of education funding
- A required [carbon-free electric grid by 2040](#)
- A massive [\\$2.58 billion capital construction package](#)
- A mix of tax cuts and increases to make the state’s revenue system more progressive
- A refundable child tax credit for lower-income Minnesotans
- Membership in the [National Popular Vote Interstate Compact](#)
- FREE BREAKFAST AND LUNCH FOR ALL MINNESOTA K-12 STUDENTS

Thanks to our SD66 DFL legislators for their weighty contributions to these successes!

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Barack Obama  
@BarackObama

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If you need a reminder that elections have consequences, check out what's happening in Minnesota.



Barack Obama  
@BarackObama

...

Since then, Minnesota has made progress on a whole host of issues – from protecting abortion rights and new gun safety measures to expanding access to the ballot and reducing child poverty. These laws will make a real difference in the lives of Minnesotans.

The Minnesota DFL Senate Majority and I delivered many positive outcomes

by Sen. Clare Oumou Verbeten



In my first session, the DFL Majority worked tirelessly to deliver positive outcomes for our community. Here are some highlights:

Bills

I introduced a total of sixty-one bills and was able to pass forty-three of those bills successfully, either as part of an omnibus or individually.

Committee assignments

In my first session I served as vice chair for the Judiciary and Public Safety committee, and also served on the Education Finance, Higher Education, and Labor committees. Additionally, I was part of conference committees for Judiciary and Public Safety, Higher Education, and Cannabis.

Investment in District 66

District 66 received \$157 million in direct funding. This includes \$110 million for Local and County Government Aid, \$22 million for Public Safety Aid, and \$25 million for capital investment projects.

DFL Senate Majority delivers

Protecting democracy

We made efforts to restore the vote for Minnesotans who have served their time, ensuring that their voices are heard. Automatic voter registration was also implemented, simplifying the voter registration process. Furthermore, sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds were given the opportunity to preregister, fostering early civic participation.

Expanding fundamental rights

Important steps were taken to protect the fundamental rights of Minnesotans. The PRO Act codified Minnesotans' reproductive freedom, while the banning of conversion therapy affirmed LGBTQ+ rights. The Trans Refuge Act prevented out-of-state interference in gender-affirming healthcare.

Supporting families

To support families, universal meals were provided to all students, ensuring that no child goes hungry at school. The North Star Promise program made college tuition-free for Minnesota students from households with combined incomes below \$80k. Additionally, the transformative Paid Family Medical Leave program will allow workers to take up to twelve weeks of leave for family or medical reasons.

Legalizing cannabis

Adult-use cannabis was finally legalized and regulated, while special attention was paid to expunging the records of 66,000 Minnesotans who served time as part of the failed "War on Drugs."

100 percent clean energy

A new regulatory framework was established to achieve 100 percent carbon-free electricity in Minnesota by 2040, making significant progress towards reducing carbon emissions to uphold our commitment to fighting climate change.

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My first session highlights

Public safety

My Minnesota Connecting Families legislation provided free phone calls for incarcerated individuals and their families, eliminating fees and prohibiting commissions. We also severely limited the use of no-knock warrants by law enforcement in our state.

Housing

A \$100 million forgivable downpayment assistance fund was created to support first-generation homeowners, offering up to \$35,000 in assistance. My slate of sweeping tenant rights reforms was also implemented, including rent transparency, timely repairs, fourteen-day pre-eviction notices, and eviction expungements.

Education

Menstrual equity was promoted by providing free menstrual products in all bathrooms to high school and college students across the state. Additionally, \$86.9 million was allocated to school districts to address uncompensated English Language Learner (ELL) costs.

These accomplishments reflect our commitment to promoting equity and justice in our communities. I am so excited to continue working on your behalf in future sessions. Stay tuned for more updates and opportunities to get involved!

Join me in conversations with neighbors

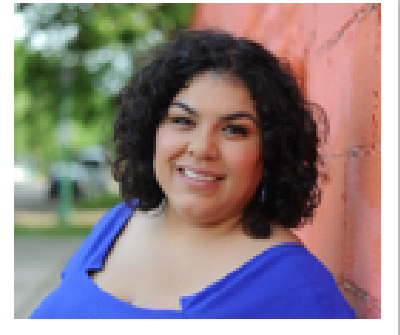
by Rep. Athena Hollins, SD66B

What a historic session it has been! We were able to accomplish such big wins for working families, kids, LGBTQIA2S+, and so many more, and it was all thanks to having the support of voters across Minnesota showing up and turning out to elect our Trifecta.

I spent much of the last election cycle going door-to-door, not just in 66B, but all over Minnesota to tell folks about the people-centered agenda that we planned to enact if they would entrust us with their vote. Certainly, not all of those conversations were easy. Some folks needed persuading on issues. Others needed persuading that their participation was meaningful. I am always glad to make the case for the DFL on issues, but it is incredibly hard to hear that some people have felt so left behind by our politics that they fully opt out.

Over the course of the rest of the summer, my team and I will be out talking to folks in 66B about our legislative accomplishments. I may still have another year of my term to serve, but I want to make sure that we are engaging people throughout the year, and not just at election time. Inviting people into the process, meeting people where they are at, and organizing our collective power, together, is how we will be able to get things done at the Minnesota Legislature.

As a party unit, this is one of our core jobs—organizing and building support for the DFL agenda. I hope after reading this, you will join me in conversations with neighbors this summer to help build on the engagement that we have already done as a senate district.





I hope my story uplifts and inspires

by Rep. Leigh Finke, SD66A

This is an excerpt from Rep. Finke's latest [legislative update](#).

I have really enjoyed the opportunity during the interim to engage with the community and get back into my comfort zone with organizing. Pride month was a great opportunity to connect with queer folks across the state and talk about the work we are doing to make our communities more inclusive. A highlight from Pride was joining Rep. Ilhan Omar at OutFront Minnesota's celebration. It was joyous sharing space with exceptional leaders in our LGBTQIA2S+ community.

The Queer Legislative Caucus accomplished a lot this year, but there's still more work to be done.

Here's what I've been up to:

PRIDE month

It was an honor to walk in this year's Twin Cities Pride Parade. It is such an important event to celebrate the LGBTQIA2S+ community and our progress towards equality. Marching alongside my friends and allies and showing the world that we are proud to be who we are was extremely rewarding. As a community, we came together to collectively say to our LGBTQIA2S+ community, you belong here.



Press and publications

Getting to share my story and experience with others in our community and communities across the nation has been a dream come true. I hope my story uplifts and inspires the next generation of leaders and champions in the LGBTQIA2S+ community to be fearlessly authentic and never give up hope.

[NBC Now](#) [MPR: CHANGEMAKERS](#)

[COMMON DREAMS](#)

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Keystone Community Food Center

I was happy to join St. Paul Mayor Carter and city councilmembers to break new ground on the Keystone Community Food Center. My bill [HF 1265](#) invested \$2.6 million in their program. Keystone is making a real difference in the lives of people in our community. They are working to end hunger and strengthen our communities, one meal at a time. I would like to thank Keystone for their important work, and I encourage you to get involved with their efforts. There are many ways to help, from volunteering your time to donating food or money. Together, we can make a difference in the fight against hunger.

Stay connected

Please continue to reach out with any input, ideas, or feedback about the issues important to you. I value hearing from you, so call or email any time. You can follow my new [Facebook page](#) or contact my office.

It's an honor to represent our community in the Minnesota House.

Committee assignments

Environment and Natural Resources Finance and Policy

Human Services Policy

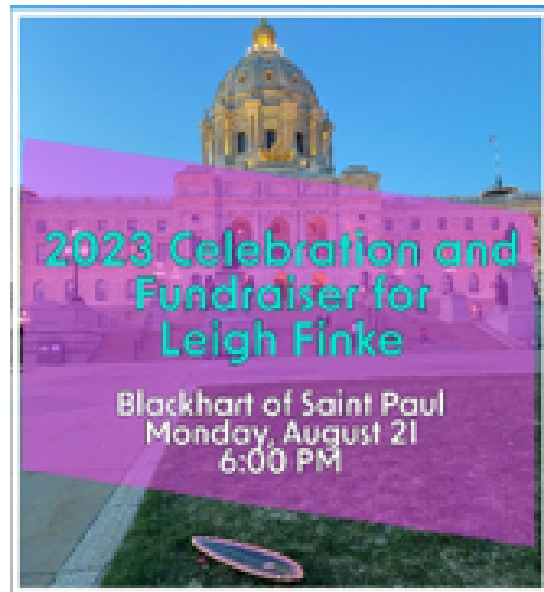
Judiciary Finance and Civil Law

Legacy Finance

Legislative assistant

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Ramsey and Washington counties tackle food waste

by Commissioner Trista Martinson



Ramsey and Washington counties are joining forces to tackle the pressing issue of food waste. Our new program aims to divert food waste from our garbage stream into organics recycling, paving the way for a more sustainable future.

Every year, residents of our counties collectively throw away enough food and recycling each year to fill Allianz Field. All of that material is currently burned to create energy, and while that is better than being buried in landfills, it is clearly not a sustainable solution in an era of carbon reduction and climate change.

This program presents an opportunity for individuals and businesses to play a vital role in reducing our ecological footprint. By separating food waste from regular garbage, we can convert it into valuable compost or renewable energy instead. The organics recycling initiative also aligns with creating circular economies in our communities. Properly managing food waste can enrich soil quality, enhance agricultural productivity, and reduce the need for synthetic fertilizers. Recycling and

reusing materials also lessen the extraction of resources from sensitive ecological areas worldwide.

Ramsey and Washington counties' leadership in spearheading this initiative shows that collective action is necessary to address food waste effectively. Together, let's pave the way for a cleaner, greener, and more sustainable future—one compost bin at a time. Expect to hear more from Ramsey County as this program rolls out countywide over the next year, and keep an eye out for the new green durable compostable bags that will be provided free of charge for participating households.



You can adopt a storm drain

by Gwen Willems



Photo courtesy of the CGEE

Care to have a positive impact on the environment by volunteering just fifteen minutes, twice a month?

The adopt-a-drain initiative was developed by the Center for Global Environmental Education (CGEE) at Hamline University and the Metro Watershed Partners in 2014. Eighty-six programs are now run by CGEE's Adopt-a-Drain with Minneapolis boasting the highest number of drains adopted. More than 170 adopt-a-storm-drain programs are active in the United States. The tallies: 11,316 people have adopted 20,408 drains and collected 607,655 pounds of debris.

What would you do?

Choose a storm drain in your neighborhood to adopt, give it a name, keep it clear of leaves, trash, and other debris on the drain surface year round, and report your cleaning activities.

Why are clean storm drains important?

Storm drains carry trash and organic pollutants directly to local lakes, rivers, and wetlands.

Sign up here

You can estimate the amount of debris you collect and enter it online so total results can be tallied.

Spread the word

Tell neighbors and friends about your experience adopting a storm drain and urge them to join you in preventing water pollution. Suggest they:

- Put trash in the garbage. Otherwise it can clog drains and pipes, causing flooding.
- Keep leaves, grass, and dirt off streets and sidewalks because they contain phosphorus, which feeds the algae that turn lakes green.
- Pick up after pets, since dog poop carries harmful bacteria and phosphorus.
- Sweep up leftover salt and reuse it. It harms waterways and aquatic life. Just one teaspoon of salt pollutes five gallons of water forever.

By working together, communities can help keep our water clean.

Thanks to [CGEE](#) for information used in this article.

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

The Minnesota State Fair is coming soon!

Care to volunteer in the donut booth and help fund our DFL activities for the next year? Our donut booth shifts this year are from 7:30-1:30, 1:00-6:30, and 6:00-11:30 on both Tuesday, August 29, and Monday, September 4 (Labor Day).

To sign up, contact Linda Zelig at lmzelig@gmail.com

Also encourage your children and DFLer friends and neighbors to take a shift. You raise money for SD66, get free entry to the fair, have fun and a chance to talk with elected officials, use a shuttle bus ride for volunteers, and get plentiful breaks to enjoy fair food and activities.

Minnesota State Central Committee meeting addresses violence

by Gwen Willems

More than 370 people attended a special, virtual, one-issue meeting of the State Central Committee (SCC) on May 30 to focus on proposed bylaws. Following several proposed amendments and hours of discussion and voting, the SCC approved rules allowing the party to ban individuals who engaged in violence from attending DFL events or seeking DFL endorsement.

The bylaws proposed by the state were passed with little revision. Approved bylaws read:

BYLAW #1

The Minnesota DFL State Executive Committee, following an investigation and then upon a 2/3rds vote of its members who are present and eligible to vote, can immediately and permanently disqualify an individual from seeking the DFL endorsement or letter of support, at any level, if the individual or supporters of their campaign have engaged in, incited, or consciously condoned physical assault, threats of violence, or violent acts while actively campaigning or participating in any function of the DFL Party. The decision of the State Executive Committee may be appealed to the State Central Committee.

BYLAW #2

The Minnesota DFL State Executive Committee, following an investigation and then upon a 2/3rds vote of its members who are present and eligible to vote, can permanently remove and ban any individual from elected or appointed party position, including serving as delegates or alternates to a convention, at any level, if that individual has engaged in, incited, or consciously condoned physical assault, threats of violence, or violent acts during any function of the DFL Party. Because of the timely threat to members of the DFL Party, this action will be immediate and require no formal hearing or removal process by the Code of Conduct Committee.

UPCOMING EVENT

Monday, August 7, 6:30 p.m.
SD66 DFL Central Committee Meeting

New Life Presbyterian Church
965 Larpentour Avenue West, Roseville 55113

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

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City of St. Paul DFL
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Chair position open

4th District DFL
Chair position open

Minnesota State DFL
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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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