



SPECIAL REPORT

Victoria Reinhardt reflects on being a county commissioner

Questions by Gwen Willems

After serving seven terms as a Ramsey County Commissioner, beginning in 1996, Victoria Reinhardt decided to not seek re-election this year. The DFL endorsing convention for District 7 will be held on May 18 at the Maplewood Sheet Metal Workers Hall, 1681 Cope Ave E A, Maplewood, MN 55109. District 7 spans Maplewood, North St. Paul, and White Bear Lake.

Commissioner Reinhardt is known as an environmental and waste-to-energy advocate. She was a founding board member and chairperson of the Recycling Association of Minnesota from 1989 to 1991 as well as chairperson of the City of White Bear Lake Recycling Advisory Committee. She currently serves as Vice Chairperson of the Ramsey/Washington Recycling and Energy Board, Partnership on Waste and Energy and the Energy, Environment and Land Use Steering Committee of the National Association of Counties.

Commissioner Reinhardt also focused on metro-wide issues such as transportation, housing, and integration of geographic information systems. Read more about her education and accolades [here](#). Her email address is Victoria.Reinhardt@co.ramsey.mn.us

This is our Q&A with Commissioner Reinhardt.

During your time as a commissioner, what changes have you seen in the county and the county board?

The most important change has been the way in which the Ramsey County Board of Commissioners makes decisions that impact the lives of our residents. We listen to community input through a significant increase in engaging the community in a variety of ways. Ramsey County has also changed the budget process. Developing and adopting the budget changed from a departmental, siloed approach to one that focuses on service teams and measurable, equitable outcomes.

What are your proudest achievements as commissioner?

As Chair of the Budget Committee, I am very proud of Ramsey County earning the triple A bond rating from both Standard & Poor's and Moody's for twenty-three years in a row, saving taxpayers millions of dollars.

I am passionate about my environmental work, specifically regarding garbage. We have made progress in recycling, reusing, composting, collecting organics, and reducing toxicity and, if all goes well, are moving into next-generation technology with an anaerobic digester to produce natural gas and biochar. If you haven't toured the Ramsey and Washington Counties Recycling & Energy Center in Newport, I highly recommend it.

Finally, I am a fierce, and sometimes stubborn, advocate on a variety of important issues facing our county and am proud of my work over the years.

What was most unexpected about the job for you?

On my first day as a county commissioner, I remember sitting at my desk and feeling the weight and responsibility on my shoulders to serve my constituents well. I did not fully understand that saying until that moment. I vowed to do my best every single day.

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What prompted and motivated you to run originally?

I worked for Ramsey County Commissioner Bob Orth in the mid 1980s and fell in love with county government. So many aspects of everyday life are impacted by local decision-makers, and I wanted to make a difference in people's lives.

My high school classmates commented to me that if there had been a category for "Person least likely to run for public office" I would have won it. I am an introvert, but when it comes to helping others, my passion to make a difference takes over.

At the beginning, did you imagine you'd be a commissioner this long?

This question is easy—the answer is "No."

Looking back at the times you've run for this elected office, how have political campaigns changed?

Technology has changed the face of campaigning, and not always in a good way. I was an early adopter and one of the first to have a website for my re-election in 2000. Being able to broadcast your campaign message, get real-time feedback and generally engage people is amazing. The potential to inform constituents is great, but in recent elections, the negative and often untrue statements from those who feel emboldened to spread fear instead of hope, is unsettling, at best.

What will you especially miss about being a commissioner?

I will miss working with other commissioners, our city, state and federal partners and my constituents on big issues as well as individual concerns. I will not miss working fifty or more hours a week.

What are you especially looking forward to in retirement?

Spending more time with my family, especially my two grandchildren, and reconnecting with friends. I also want to pursue advocacy regarding the environment and climate change efforts. Not sure where that will take me. I'll just have to wait and see.

What major issues does the county face in the next few years?

This is the hardest question to answer because the responsibilities and mandates placed on county government are so varied and interconnected that I cannot name them in order of importance. The major overall issue facing the county is to continually strive for "Prosperity, Opportunity, Well-being, and Accountability for all."

Is there anything left undone you'd like to share?

There will always be things that still need more work, but I feel good about the progress I have helped facilitate and am confident that Ramsey County will be in good hands.

What advice do you have for your successor?

- Listen to the viewpoint of others with respect.
- Gather background information to make informed decisions.
- Know that it doesn't matter who gets credit, as long as the desired outcome is achieved.
- Govern from the heart, while balancing the cost to taxpayers with the need for action.

Who served as your important friends or mentors?

Ramsey County Commissioner Bob Orth was an amazing mentor and friend. On a personal level, he made sure that I received the tools to keep me and my children safe from domestic abuse in my first marriage. I have already noted his influence on my decision to run for Ramsey County Commissioner.

My husband of 32 years, J.P. Barone, gave me the courage to believe in myself so that I could run for public office and achieve my educational goal of earning a Doctorate in Public Administration. I would not be where I am today without his and my family's support, friendship, and patience.

I am truly blessed to have so many wonderful friends and mentors with whom I can share all the ups, downs, and in-betweens in my life on a personal and professional level.

If you were a tree, what type of tree would you be? (That was just to give you a laugh.)

The mighty Redwood for its strength and my formerly red hair. Thanks for the laugh!



Just keep fighting

by Rep. Leigh Finke

This information is from Rep. Finke's newsletter dated April 19, 2024

It's raining floor sessions!

With committees finishing up this week—bittersweet!—the Minnesota House of Representatives is headed into our floor sessions. We're speaking a lot, sitting a lot, and passing some really important packages for the people of Minnesota.

Thanks to those of you who visited during my special Earth Day office hours! I love the earth. As a kid, I would climb trees with reckless abandon, finding a home in the leaves and curiosity among their branches. It's why I fight for things like tree cover and the removal and treatment of invasive species.

Bill packages passed (April 15, 2024)

House Higher Education policy bill, [HF 4024](#), is a focused effort to build off the historic investments included in the 2023 Higher Education Budget, like the North Star Promise which provides free college to qualifying students.

[HF 3436](#), the House Transportation policy bill builds off last year's historic budget that capitalized on state and federal funds to deliver a generational investment in transportation statewide. We also passed [HF 3071](#), which will ensure that drivers' tests in Minnesota will be in plain English—a very helpful simplification for new drivers.

[HF 4176](#), the House Early Education Policy bill streamlines existing programs for young learners and ensures greater access to early education for students and families in St. Paul.

[HF 3454](#), the Military Affairs Policy bill, and [HF 4334](#), the Veterans Affairs Policy bill. The Military Affairs bill includes referral bonuses for the National Guard, adjustments to help the National Guard investigate and prosecute crime, and language to broaden the definition of trespassing on National Guard facilities.

[HF 3631](#), a package of modifications and extensions for previously authorized Capital Investment projects. The legislation mostly relates to the two Capital Investment bills [signed into law last year](#).

[HF 3614](#), the Public Safety Policy bill, continues House Democrats' comprehensive approach to public safety and crime prevention with support for victims, criminal justice reform, policy modernization, and more.

Our [2024 Elections Policy Bill](#) focuses on improved voter access and election transparency. It targets policy areas where the state can improve voter turnout and ensure that if voting is restricted, voters have a means of redress. Additionally, it enhances disclosure requirements for those seeking to influence elections, expands voter access and comprehension, and increases election transparency.

A [labor policy bill](#) that includes provisions to strengthen the minimum wage, ban shadow non-competes, and increase pay transparency.

Gender-affirming care (April 17, 2024)

The Minnesota House Commerce Finance and Policy Committee passed the Commerce policy bill. The policy package includes my bill, HF 2607, that requires health plans to provide coverage for physical or mental-health services for gender-affirming care. The bill also requires that health plans consider gender-affirming care as medically necessary as long as it meets professional standards, guidelines, or medical practices.

Having passed the Minnesota House and Senate, the Commerce policy bill will now be finalized in a conference committee.

Ramsey County has a new Climate Equity Action Plan

by Dist. 3 Commissioner and Chair Trista Martinson



I am excited to share that on April 16, 2024, the Board of Commissioners adopted our first comprehensive Climate Equity Action Plan. The plan is part of our county's strategic priority to respond to climate change and increase community resilience and builds on years of previous work in a number of areas.

Our climate is changing rapidly. From prolonged, extreme heat, drought, intense storms and flooding, to massive wildfires that make the air unhealthy for millions of people. This is the new "normal" we are seeing across the country and on a scale that breaks with observable climate patterns over hundreds of years.

Here in Ramsey County, climate change has brought us more days with air quality alerts and extreme heat warnings, more extreme weather, longer allergy seasons, and wetter and warmer winters—and the prospect of more illness caused by disease-carrying insects. These changes impact all our residents' health as well as the health of our natural environment.

While climate equity work is not new for Ramsey County, what is new, and exciting, is that this plan integrates work across the county making it a truly comprehensive plan, developed with and for community, and centered in equity. It recognizes the growing needs of our community, and how climate change disproportionality affects underrecognized communities.

With this plan, the county is well-positioned to mitigate negative impacts on the health and well-being of our residents... and to pursue new opportunities **and** approaches to address climate change. These new opportunities can

- Improve our shared infrastructure and the physical environments where we live, work and play,
- Advance our local economy with green jobs and technology,
- And expand life-sustaining careers that will build our community resilience.

Just as all Ramsey County is affected by climate change, all county departments, and our community partners have a role to play in addressing climate change.

This plan was developed with community and the participation of staff from every county service team. It is designed to bring together and unify work that in the past may have occurred separately without an overarching framework. Today, we go forward with a new, focused, coordinated action plan to take an equitable approach to building our county's climate response.

To learn more, visit <https://www.ramseycounty.us/climate-action>



We can all do small actions to help the environment

by Gwen Willems

The 6 Rs—updated from the old 3 Rs—are a handy way to remind ourselves of how we can do small acts that combined with others' actions can have a large impact on the environment. The 6 Rs are Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Refuse, Repair, and Repurpose (or Re-think). With an understanding of the waste hierarchy, we can better recognize our individual impact on the waste stream, self-reflect, and learn new action ideas.

What's the status of waste in Minnesota? According to Ramsey County, nearly two-thirds of materials in Minnesota landfills and incinerators could have been reused, recycled, or composted. Reducing this amount improves public health, conserves resources and energy, and

reduces pollution and greenhouse-gas emissions. Similar to the EPA's national waste management hierarchy, Minnesota's waste hierarchy from most to least preferred options is reduce, reuse, recycle, recycle organics, make waste into energy, use landfill with gas recovery, and landfill.

In a recent talk, Gregory Goodwine, a health educator with Ramsey County, shared this information and tips for what we can do.

Reduce

- Consume less, waste less.
- Plan meals and grocery shopping to prevent food waste.
- Think of ways to decrease utility consumption (water, electricity, gas, etc.).
- Buy used instead of new.
- Use less textiles. Do we need to change our wardrobes so often? It is estimated that there are 34 billion pounds of post-consumer textile waste annually in the United States. Of that, 66 percent is landfilled, 19 percent goes to energy recovery, and 15 percent is recycled. There isn't a good end market to ensure that clothes are recycled.

Reuse

There are many advantages: diverting materials from the trash waste stream reduces greenhouse gas emissions, it saves natural resources, prevents pollution created from harvesting new materials to make products, saves energy by not creating new products, and reduces toxicity of waste when switching to nonhazardous or less hazardous materials.

- Try to buy nothing or next to nothing, preventing items from going into the waste stream.
- Use Facebook or a listserv to gift things you no longer need and receive things you want. An extra bonus is creating community and relationships.
- Reuse, salvage, and deconstruct building materials. Deconstruction is taking apart a building so its components can be reused. Eighty percent of Minnesota's construction and demolition waste is landfilled. This applies to appliances, cabinetry, hardware, light fixtures, lumber, solid wood doors, trim, windows, and wood flooring.
- Use donation stores such as Arc's Value Village and Goodwill; online marketplaces such as Craigslist, Nextdoor, Facebook; consignment stores; garage sales; and estate sales.



Deconstructing

(Continued on next page)

Recycle

- Read recycling labels. Watch for greenwashing, when a company makes misleading statements about their products or organization. Don't wish-cycle, putting non-recyclables in recycling hoping they will get recycled anyway. Instead, you could be polluting a larger unit of items and getting them all rejected at the recycling plant.
- Take a tour of Eureka or the R&E Center to learn more.
- Use the county's online tool, [A to Z Recycling and Disposal Guide](#).
- Determine if a particular item is recyclable or not and how to prepare it for collection.
- When needed, call the recycling hotline at (651) 633-3279.

Refuse

- As a consumer, ask yourself, "Do I need this? Is this item necessary or not?"
- The residential recycling pick-up system is limited to plastics #1, 2, and 5. Film/plastic bags need to be taken to stores to be recycled.
- Say no to single-use plastics.
- Ask, "Can I use reusable alternatives to plastic straws, disposable coffee cups, and plastic water bottles?"



A Ramsey County Fix-It Clinic

Repair

- Consider if the item is truly single use.
- Minnesota has a Right to Repair Law, effective July 1, 2024, which "...requires manufacturers to allow anyone, including consumers or third-party repair shops, to buy the parts and tools necessary to repair their electronic equipment."
- Reduce the number of repairable objects that are thrown in the trash by taking your broken item to a Ramsey County Fix-It Clinic, where items are fixed for free on the fourth Saturday of each month. Thanks to the clinics, more than 17,000 pounds of waste have been diverted since 2015. If you're handy, you can also volunteer to be a fixer.
- Consider other repair resources such as local repair, mending, and alteration shops.
- Use iFixit online tutorials to fix items yourself.
- Check out needed items from the Minnesota Tool Library.

Repurpose (or Re-think)

By using something for a purpose that was not originally intended, we can divert trash from the waste stream, be creative, and save money.

- Upcycle by creating new clothes, towels, or pillows from used textiles.
- Use old plastic water bottles as plant holders.
- Give plastic restaurant takeout containers new purposes at home.

If you have questions, contact Gregory Goodwine, health educator with Ramsey County, at gregory.goodwine@co.ramsey.mn.us, for more information.

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

Get to know our new chair

by Rob Thomas, SD66 DFL Chair

Greetings, SD66! If we haven't had the pleasure of meeting, I'm Rob Thomas. The name given to me by my grandmother is *Wokisuye Yuha Mani* (Walks with Memories). I was recently elected chair for SD66 DFL at our convention and I am beyond proud to serve in this role.

My wife, Kate, and I moved to Saint Paul from South Minneapolis in 2018 and have enjoyed getting to know our community and neighbors. Since then, we've added two to our household—our niece, RickyMae, and our dog, Beauregard Jackson Pickett Burnside (let's see if there are any other musical theatre nerds out there that might get that reference), but we just call him Beau. During the day, I am the development director at History Theatre in Saint Paul and in my free time, I am a professional volunteer. I currently serve as chair of the Board of Directors for the White Bear Lake Area Historical Society, as a board member for Minnesota Citizens for the Arts, and a member of the St. Paul Rotary Club. I also volunteer with many organizations like Solid Ground, Small Sums, Irish Arts MN, and Children's Performing Arts. As a proud Dakota descendant, I am honored to be very involved in Indigenous organizations and advocacy.

As someone who builds relationships for a living, my goal for my time with SD66 is to figure out ways to bring DFLers together for meaningful and enriching shared experiences. I'd love to bring back social events like our summer picnic and our election night party. I want to build on the work previous SD66 chairs have done to make our gatherings both fun and productive. And, of course, we are all dedicated to doing our part to keep Minnesota **blue**. At the SD66 convention, I was in awe of the incredible lineup of elected officials that live within our district and I am excited to help our district do what we can to keep them in office and support them in their work. This includes signing up for you shift at the State Fair Grandstand Donut Booth.

We'll be planning our first SD66 DFL Central Committee meeting very soon and from there, we'll build out schedule of events for the remainder of the year. If you need anything or would like to know more about me, feel free to reach out to me at robwthomas.dfl@gmail.com. I'm looking forward to working with you all and advancing the things we believe in.



The SD66 DFL Convention efficiently conducted business

by Gwen Willems

On Saturday, March 23, the SD66 convention was chaired by J.P. Barone. The Nominations Committee's slate of candidates for party officials was approved. Officers include Chair Rob Thomas, Vice Chair Theresa St. Aoro, and Treasurer Noelle Bakken. Elected SD66 directors are Liz Danielson, James Marusek, Richard Moore, John Neely, Aaron Roessler, Alice Shapiro, Gwen Willems, and Linda Zelig. State Central Committee delegates and alternates who were nominated and elected are Melissa Kangas, Steve Lundeen, Aaron Roessler, Paul Schroeder, and Gwen Willems. Note that SD66 Chair Rob Thomas and Vice Chair Theresa St. Aoro are automatically members of the State Central Committee.

The SD66 convention separated into Minnesota House Districts to endorse candidates.

In the SD66A convention, current Rep. Leigh Finke was nominated. With no opposing candidates, Rep. Finke was endorsed as the DFL candidate. In the SD66B convention, current Rep. Athena Hollins was nominated. With no opposing candidates, Rep. Hollins was endorsed as the DFL candidate.

Elected officials and others who visited the convention and spoke included Rep. Betty McCollum, U.S. CD4; Minnesota Secretary of State Steve Simon; Sen. Clare Oumou Verbeten, SD66; and Chair Greg Hansen, CD4 DFL.

Nominating speeches and elections were also held for Minnesota State Convention delegates.

Volunteer for the DFL donut booth

by Linda Zelig

It is time to start thinking about the Minnesota State Fair and our opportunity to volunteer at the donut booth. 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. Encourage your children and DFLer friends and neighbors to take a shift.

This year our shifts are on:

Sunday, August 25 — 7:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m., 1:00-6:30 p.m., and 6:00-11:30 p.m.

Thursday, August 29 — 7:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m., 1:00-6:30 p.m., and 6:00-11:30 p.m.

Contact me at (612) 747-7244 or lmzelig@gmail.com to sign up for a shift and receive additional information. I hope to create an online system to streamline volunteer sign-ups.

This year Priscilla Wyeth, myself, and Cynthia Anderson are serving on the board of Best Fair Foods, with Karen Schaffer continuing as an at-large member.

CALENDAR

CD4 Convention

Saturday, May 4, registration begins at 11:00 a.m.,
convention convenes at noon
North Central Regional Council of Carpenters Headquarters
700 Olive Street, Saint Paul, MN 55130-9825

State DFL Convention

Friday, May 31- Sunday, June 2
Duluth Convention Center

SD66 Central Committee

Monday, May 6, 7-8 p.m.

Ramsey County Library – Shoreview
4560 Victoria St. N
Shoreview, MN 555126

Events are subject to change. Visit our website at <http://sd66-dfl.org/> for updates.

Elected officials

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Rep. Leigh Finke (66A)

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Rep. Athena Hollins (66B)

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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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