



### SPECIAL REPORTS

## *Remember to vote by Tuesday, February 11!*

The special election for Ramsey County Commissioner in District 3 will be held on Tuesday, February 11. This is to fill the seat vacated by the retiring Victoria Reinhardt. Garrison McMurtrey is the DFL- and labor-endorsed candidate. Read more about him in his article on page 5 and SD66 Chair Rob Thomas' article on page 8.

Spread the word to your family and friends who might not be aware of this special election.

Remember that you can vote early. Find your polling place at <https://pollfinder.sos.state.mn.us/>

## *Watch for legal actions and 40B election results*

As of publication date, no new date has been set for the special election for the 40B position in the Minnesota House of Representatives. Curtis Johnson was elected to that position in November, but he was disqualified for not maintaining a residence in 40B. A special election was set for January 28, but the Minnesota Supreme Court ruled that it must be delayed.

The Minnesota House of Representatives convened on Tuesday, January 14, but all 66 DFL members boycotted the session to block a quorum, waiting until the 40B seat is filled. If a DFLer is elected to that seat, there will be a tie of 67 DFL to 67 GOP representatives.

On January 24, the Minnesota Supreme Court sided with DFLers, ruling unanimously that 68 members must be present to conduct business in the state House of Representatives. According to the *Minnesota Star Tribune* (January 25, page 1), "The DFL said the court order nullified all actions taken by the 67-member Republican caucus since the session started January 14 without the Democrats present."

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### Session break was busy

by Sen. Clare Oumou Verbeten

*Submitted information was from her newsletter.*

Although work at the Capitol generally slows down after session, I still have so much to share with you.

#### District updates

At the top of the month, I toured the Ramsey/Washington County Recycling and Energy Center. This facility has been making a big impact in both counties for more than forty years, working to reduce and repurpose waste. It is also playing a crucial role in Minnesota's goal to recycle 75 percent of its waste by 2030. I had the pleasure of touring the center with its new executive director, Trista Martinson, a.k.a. Ramsey County's "Trash Queen." After touring the site, I can say I love trash, too! Her team is doing amazing work.

The following day, I attended the GreenLight Fund Twin Cities' holiday dinner to celebrate its incredible work over the past year. I've been a member of the Greenlight's Advisory Council for several years, and since most of our meetings were virtual, it was so refreshing to connect with everyone in person. GreenLight Fund is a national nonprofit network

focused on meeting the needs of the thirteen local communities it serves. Here in the Twin Cities, the organization works to address disparities in housing, education, employment, and wealth, with a strong focus on supporting Black and Brown communities.

Later, my colleagues and I attended our first DFL joint caucus retreat at Prairie Island to prepare for the upcoming 2025 legislative session. We spent time setting our agenda and discussing priorities for the year ahead. It was great to reconnect with everyone.

I also had the honor of attending the Minnesota Business Coalition for Racial Equity's (MBCRE) December All-Hands Meeting and their inaugural Impact Awards Luncheon. The event recognized organizations that have actively supported MBCRE's initiatives, and it was wonderful to celebrate the work of groups like the Minnesota Timberwolves, Twin Cities Habitat for Humanity, and Children's Minnesota, which were all recipients of the Impact Award. We also thanked outgoing Managing Director Tiffani Daniels for her incredible contributions to the organization and warmly welcomed the new Managing Director, Dr. Angela Spranger.

Later in the month, I joined in celebrating Victoria Reinhardt's retirement after nearly thirty years of service as the Ramsey County Commissioner for the White Bear Lake area. Her career is marked by countless achievements, including her work on the 2020 Census, which helped Minnesota retain its 8th congressional seat by a margin of just twenty-six residents! Kelly Miller is stepping into the role of Ramsey County commissioner, and I'm looking forward to working with her.

Last year, I carried the bill to support the City of Saint Paul's efforts to revitalize the Xcel Energy Center. This project is a cornerstone for the city's economic growth, generating an estimated \$400 million in annual revenue. As so much of Saint Paul's land is nontaxable, diversifying our tax base is essential for funding crucial city services. The Xcel Energy Center plays a vital role in revitalizing downtown, and its current building has reached the end of its lifespan. The City of Saint Paul and the Minnesota Wild invited Saint Paul legislators to tour the arena and review plans for its upgrade. It was an insightful discussion, and I am excited to champion the bonding bill necessary to get this project across the finish line.

For the past year, I've been honored to serve on the Attorney General's Worker Misclassification Task Force. This issue has been a passion of mine since my time with the Carpenters Union, where I first encountered the devastating impact of worker misclassification. Misclassification often leads to workers being denied overtime, workplace protections, and access to social insurance programs like unemployment insurance and workers' compensation.



*(Continued on next page)*

Last year, Rep. Greenman and I introduced legislation (SF 4483) to tackle this issue, and we plan to bring forward additional bills in the upcoming session. Protecting workers and ensuring fair treatment is a top priority for me, and I look forward to continuing this important work.

At our final meeting, the task force passed a comprehensive set of recommendations to address this systemic issue. These include:

- Education and Outreach: Providing plain-language guidance to employers and workers on classification laws.
- Enforcement: Strengthening penalties for misclassification and funding partnerships with community organizations to support workers.
- Data Collection: Conducting annual audits and reporting on the scale and cost of misclassification.
- Streamlining Classification Tests: Simplifying the process for determining proper worker classification.



I cherished spending the holiday season with my family and hope you were able to enjoy time with loved ones as well. The holidays are a time to reflect on what we are grateful for, and I'm so thankful for the privilege of serving District 66.

Unfortunately, this week brought heartbreaking news about the loss of our former Majority Leader, Kari Dziedzic. I am incredibly fortunate to have served alongside Kari. She was an exceptional majority leader, a constant problem-solver, and a source of strength for all of us. As a freshman senator, I came in nervous and unsure of what to expect, but Kari immediately put me at ease with her clear, honest, and direct guidance. The historic 2023 session would not have been possible without her leadership. Kari was truly one of a kind, and I will miss her deeply. Even though our time together was short, the memories we made will always hold a special place in my heart. I attended her memorial service last week and encourage others to honor her life and legacy in any way they can.



Lastly, I am thrilled to announce that my former Legislative Assistant, Tristan Voegeli, has stepped into a new role as the Senate Education Policy Committee administrator. Congratulations to Tristan! I am equally excited to welcome my new Legislative Assistant, Kashanti Taylor. Kashanti graduated magna cum laude from Howard University with a B.S. in biology and double minors in chemistry and sociology. She is passionate about mental-health

advocacy, equity in education, and health education. With her experience and commitment, I am confident she will be a great addition to the team.

Please reach out to my office any time to request information or provide your input. For those requests, or any others, reach out to my legislative assistant, Kashanti Taylor at [kashanti.taylor@mnsenate.gov](mailto:kashanti.taylor@mnsenate.gov).

## Tracking the legislative session

Senate calendar: Senate committee hearing schedules can be found here at [Senate Schedules](#). Each committee will post links to scheduled bills, relevant documents, and instructions for signing up to provide public testimony.

If you're interested in specific topics, you can sign up for committee email lists [here](#) to be notified every time a new hearing is posted.

Joint calendar: A full listing of all legislative hearings can be found at [Joint Legislative Calendar](#).

Senate Media Services provides live videos of some committee hearings and audio recordings of all hearings. You will be able to find these sources on each committee posting, or you can go directly to the website and find live events and archives at [Senate Media Webcast Schedule](#)

The Minnesota House provides the same service for House committee and floor proceedings. Follow them [House TV](#)

## Visit the Capitol!

In addition to public hearings and legislative sessions, the Capitol is open to the public Monday through Saturday for public tours and many events throughout the year. There are several areas within the Capitol complex that are available to rent. The Department of Administration maintains that information on its [website](#).

## Contact me!

Reach me at [clareo@mnsenate.gov](mailto:clareo@mnsenate.gov) or (651) 296-8866. If you visit the Capitol, please consider visiting my office in the Minnesota Senate Building across the street.



## Rep. Finke provides Minnesota House update

by Rep. Leigh Finke, 66A

*Submitted information was from her newsletter.*

I'm writing with an important update on the state of the Minnesota House of Representatives. In November, Minnesotans voted for equal numbers of Democratic and Republican state representatives. A 67-67 tie in the 134-member Minnesota House of Representatives is extremely rare. Most recently, a tie occurred in 1979.

This was not the outcome I was hoping for, of course. And while a tie in the Minnesota House will present challenges for many of our district's priorities in the legislature, this is also an opportunity for Democrats to demonstrate that we can hold to our values while also working with Republicans to pass a responsible budget that moves all of Minnesotans toward a brighter future.

But before we can move to the important work of passing a budget, we must first agree to the terms of our two-year session. For the past two months, good-faith negotiations have been taking place between DFL and Republican leaders. Unfortunately, Republicans have walked away from the negotiating table, leaving all that work behind. Instead, the GOP is attempting to unseat a democratically elected member of the DFL, to illegitimately claim a majority they did not win on election day.

They have said exactly this. At a [January 6 press conference](#), Republicans confirmed their plan to use a two-week, one-seat advantage to seize control of the Minnesota House for the next two years.

Republicans also made clear that they would use their temporary one-vote advantage to unseat the democratically elected member from Shakopee, Brad Tabke. If the Republican plan unfolds, 21,980 voters who cast their ballots in the November election will be disenfranchised. A fair election will be thrown out. That is outrageous— and has never been done in Minnesota history.

I'm calling on House Republicans to abandon their overreaching efforts to grab power they did not win through the elections. Instead, Republicans should honor the election results and sign a power-sharing agreement that recognizes that Minnesotans elected 67 Republicans and 67 Democrats.

You should also know that a majority in the Minnesota House requires **68** members. It takes 68 votes to pass any bill, which means any work that gets done this session will demand bipartisan support.

I am hopeful that a power-sharing agreement can be adopted before the new legislative session begins on January 14. At this time, my focus is on doing everything within my power to make that happen. I have no interest in denying quorum by not attending floor sessions, but **we cannot allow this illegitimate power grab to occur**. This situation can be resolved, but first Republicans need to return to the negotiating table.

**If you share this goal, please let House Republicans know that both parties should return to the negotiating table to find a responsible, workable agreement that will benefit all Minnesotans.**

### Stay Connected

If you haven't yet, you can "like" and follow my [official State Representative Facebook page](#) to keep up with my work. I also invite you to contact my office with any questions or comments you may have at (651) 296-3824 or [rep.leigh.finke@house.mn.gov](mailto:rep.leigh.finke@house.mn.gov). I will be happy to assist you.

My legislative assistant, Robin Mercer-Taylor, is available at [robin.mercer-taylor@house.mn.gov](mailto:robin.mercer-taylor@house.mn.gov)

For broader legislative information, you can access the Minnesota House of Representatives Public Information Services for nonpartisan recaps of high-profile bills, committee hearings, and floor sessions with their [Session Daily](#) publication.

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



### Remember to vote by February 11

by Garrison McMurtrey, DFL-Endorsed Candidate for Dist. 3 Commissioner

Hope the start to your 2025 is going well! It's crazy to think that my special election is in the home stretch. This race is far from over though and now is not the time for folks to get complacent. Remember to cast your vote in the Special Election for Ramsey County Commissioner - District 3 by Tuesday, February 11th. Historically, special elections like mine have very low turnout. It's crucial that we never lose sight of the importance of our local elections. With the start of the Trump administration, it will be our local governments on the frontlines of defense. I will be ready on day one to fight for our community and ensure residents are getting the services and resources they deserve. The work of our county often goes overlooked, but it has such a direct impact on our everyday lives.

I am honored to be the only DFL- and labor-endorsed candidate in this race. I'm also excited about the prospects of joining the board and centering economic justice at the work we do at the county.

As I look at Ramsey County, I believe there is a lot of good that has been done to create an environment for our communities to thrive, but the work is far from over. Now it's time for us to build upon the progress we have made and think even bigger. We need ideas and policies that set us up for **the next one hundred years**. Policies that meet this moment and bring the fight for **economic justice** to the forefront.

What impacts one of us, impacts all of us. What lies ahead will take each of us working together to build the community we deserve. From creating deeply affordable housing to building safe roads to walk, bike, and drive; to investing in clean energy programs; to establishing public safety that's community-centered—we must commit to an economy that is equitable, just, and built for future generations.

If you plan to vote early you can still do so before election day at the Ramsey County Elections Office:

**Location:** 90 Plato Boulevard West, St. Paul, MN 55107

**Dates:** Monday-Friday

**Time:** 8 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

If you plan to vote on election day, you can do so at your regular polling location. Polls will be open 7 a.m.-8 p.m.

Reach out to my campaign at [contact@electgarrison.com](mailto:contact@electgarrison.com) if you have any questions or need a ride to the polls.

Let's go win this!

# The Bald Eagle is now our national bird

by Gwen Willems

On Christmas Eve 2024, President Biden signed what most of us consider overdue legislation to recognize the Bald Eagle as America's national bird. Bald Eagles have historically not been popular with everyone. Benjamin Franklin once called the creature a "bird of bad moral character," according to the Franklin Institute.

The new legislation, which was introduced by Sen. Amy Klobuchar and Rep. Brad Finstad last summer, says, "Bald Eagles are a historical symbol of the United States representing independence, strength and freedom."



*Bald Eagle.*

*Photograph by Jim Hughes, [jimhphoto.com](http://jimhphoto.com)*

For more than 200 years, the Great Seal of the United States has featured a Bald Eagle. On the Great Seal, the bird is carrying an olive branch and arrows in its talons. The Bald Eagle is also featured on American military insignia, currency, stamps, and even the helmets of an NFL team.

The lack of official designation was brought to Congress' attention by Preston Cook, an avid, long-time collector of Bald Eagle memorabilia. His artifacts are housed at the [National Eagle Center](#) in Wabasha. Scott Mehus, education director at the center, says he was shocked when he learned of the designation oversight.

"Preston Cook brought that up to us years ago, and it was like, 'Oh, come on, you're kidding me,'" Mehus told NBC News' Frank Thorp V and Ryan Nobles. "I've been talking in classes all of these years, telling [people] it's our nation's symbol and our national bird."

Native to North America, Bald Eagles live today in Canada, northern Mexico, and most states with higher concentrations in Alaska, the northern Great Lakes area, Florida, and the Pacific Northwest. Bald Eagles are not bald, but their name refers to an older meaning of bald, which is "white headed." The adult is brown with a white head and tail.

At the birth of our nation, Bald Eagles were abundant, but by the late 1800s, their populations had dwindled due to hunting, habitat loss, and lead poisoning, according to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. To save the birds, in 1940 the U.S. Congress passed the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act, making it illegal to kill, sell, or own Bald Eagles or harm their nests and eggs.

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*Bald Eagle being released at a Raptor Center event.  
Photograph by Jim Hughes, [jimhphoto.com](http://jimhphoto.com)*

That helped until pesticide use grew dramatically in post-World War II America. DDT was especially toxic. Most Bald Eagles live near water to access fish, but DDT washed into our waterways, accumulated in food chains, and made the fish toxic.

The result was that DDT interfered with Bald Eagles' calcium metabolism and ability to make strong eggshells. Eggshells were so thin that nesting mother eagles would shatter them.

Numbers hit an all-time low in 1963 with only about 417 nesting pairs remaining, according to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. Their numbers rebounded during the last decades, thanks to government protections.

DDT was banned in our nation in 1972 because it inhibited the reproduction of many birds. After enactment of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service says it "listed the species in 1978 as endangered throughout the lower 48 states, except in Michigan, Minnesota, Oregon, Washington, and Wisconsin where it was designated as threatened." They were upgraded from "endangered" to "threatened" in 1995 and removed from the list altogether in 2007.

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service estimated in 2018-2019 that 316,700 Bald Eagles lived in the contiguous United States—four times their numbers a decade earlier.

Remaining dangers include climate change and habitat loss.

Here in Minnesota, the Department of Natural Resources has an [Eagle Cam](#). You can support it and other nongame wildlife projects by purchasing critical habitat license plates.

The University of Minnesota's [Raptor Center](#) admits between 150 and 190 bald eagles every year. The center celebrates the release of healthy raptors. In Minnesota, Bald Eagles adapted well to suburban environments, nesting at popular lakes and at more traditional sites along northern lakes and the St. Croix and Mississippi Rivers.

Bald Eagles generally mate for life. They build the largest nest of any North American bird and the largest tree nests of any animal species. Their stick nests are up to 8 feet wide by 13 feet deep and a ton in weight. Nests are built near the top of the largest trees near a river or lake. Watch for eagles and eagle nests. I have even seen a nest in the backyard of friends who live along West River Road, north of the Mississippi.

*Gwen is a member of the Capitol Region Watershed District Community Advisory Committee.*

# Appreciate the positive things in life

by DFL SD66 Chair Rob Thomas

Despite my optimism, we had some disappointing news at the federal level this last election cycle. Between that and the kangaroo court proceedings our GOP legislators are putting on as they cosplay as politicians, it has been a rough start to a new year. I wanted to start my remarks to encourage everyone to prioritize taking care of themselves and their mental health. The simple things I have been working on are getting out and walking (when it's too cold, I hit the Rosedale Mall), eating more balanced meals with lots of fruits and veggies, practicing mindfulness through breathing exercises, taking more breaks from social media and screens and practicing gratitude for the positive things in my life. It's not much, but I'm noticing a difference.

I also want to celebrate some of the wins we've experienced as DFLers. We re-elected Sen. Klobuchar and Rep. McCollum and U.S. Rep. Kelly Morrison was sworn in on January 3rd as a member of the 119th Congress. Ramsey County has welcomed our first Indigenous County Commissioner. Kelly Miller (District 7) was sworn in alongside our other new Commissioner, Tara Jebens-Singh (District 1) on January 7th.

This brings me to DFL- and Labor-endorsed candidate for Ramsey County Commissioner, Garrison McMurtrey. I want to be sure that those of you in District 3 of Ramsey County know that there is a special election going on right now to fill that seat. Though the election date is February 11th, I encourage you to make use of Minnesota's early voting opportunities to go as soon as you can and vote for Garrison McMurtrey. You can vote at the Ramsey County Elections Office (90 Plato Blvd. West, Saint Paul, MN 55107) any weekday between 8:00 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. to cast your vote. And if you need a lawn sign, you can find info on who to contact at [www.electgarrison.com](http://www.electgarrison.com).

Lastly, we have spots open on the SD66 Central Committee. If you've ever been interested in a leadership role in politics at a local level, becoming an SD66 Director is a great way to see how the process works. If you are interested, you can attend a Central Committee meeting for more information. Currently, they're held on the first Monday of every month at 6:30 p.m. at New Life Presbyterian Church (965 Larpenteur Avenue W, Roseville, MN 55113).

As always, thanks for everything you do to ensure the DFL continues our purpose of electing candidates to public office who represent our shared values!



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## CALENDAR

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**SD66 Central Committee**  
**Monday, February 3, 6:30-8 p.m.**  
New Life Presbyterian Church  
965 Larpenteur Avenue, Roseville, MN 55113

**Special Election for Ramsey County**  
**Commissioner - District 3**  
**Now through Tuesday, February 11**

**CD4 Central Committee**  
**Tuesday, February 11, 7:00 p.m.**  
DFL Headquarters  
255 Plato Boulevard, St Paul, MN 55107

**SD66 Central Committee**  
**Monday, March 3, 6:30-8 p.m.**  
New Life Presbyterian Church  
965 Larpenteur Avenue, Roseville, MN 55113

**CD4 Central Committee**  
**Tuesday, March 11, 7:00 p.m.**  
DFL Headquarters  
255 Plato Boulevard, St Paul, MN 55107

**Saturday, March 29, Time TBD**  
**State DFL Business Conference**  
Westonka High School  
5905 Sunnyfield Road E, Minnetrista

**SD66 Central Committee**  
**Monday, April 7, 6:30-8 p.m.**  
New Life Presbyterian Church  
965 Larpenteur Avenue, Roseville, MN 55113

**CD4 Central Committee**  
**Tuesday, April 15, 7:00 p.m.**  
DFL Headquarters  
255 Plato Boulevard, St Paul, MN 55107

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

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### Elected officials

**Sen. Clare Oumou Verbeten**  
(651) 296-8866  
sen.coumouverbeten@senate.mn

**Rep. Leigh Finke (66A)**  
(651) 296-3824  
rep.leigh.finke@house.mn

**Rep. Athena Hollins (66B)**  
(651) 296-4224  
rep.athena.hollins@house.mn

**County Commissioner**  
**Mary Jo McGuire - Dist. 2**  
(651) 266-8356  
maryjo.mcguire@co.ramsey.mn.us

**County Commissioner**  
**Trista Martinson - Dist. 3**  
(651) 266-8360  
trista.matascastillo@co.ramsey.mn.us

### DFL contacts

**City of Roseville DFL**  
Linda Zelig, Interim Chair  
(612) 747-7244  
lmzelig@gmail.com

**Senate District 66 DFL**  
Rob Thomas, Chair  
(941) 228-5277  
robwthomas.dfl@gmail.com

**City of St. Paul DFL**  
Garrison McMurtrey, Chair  
stpauldfmn@gmail.com

**Ramsey County DFL**  
Russ Warren, Chair  
(763) 786-3591  
russellawarren@gmail.com

**4th District DFL**  
Greg Hansen, Chair  
(763) 438-6142  
GregHansenDFL@aol.com

**Minnesota State DFL**  
Ken Martin, Chair  
(651) 293-1200  
chair@df.org

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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.

### Newsletter committee

**Editor:** Gwen Willems (651) 646-8854

**Designer:** Edwin Beylerian

**Committee Members:** Paul Schroeder,  
Rob Thomas, Gwen Willems