

## Hundreds rally against budget cuts, for fair taxes and good jobs

Written by  
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A diverse group of Minnesotans filled the Capitol Rotunda on Saturday morning May 21, calling on the legislature to increase taxes on the richest two percent of Minnesotans, producing a fair budget. Faced with devastating cuts to education and health care, an estimated 1,000 participants called for a responsible budget that protects Minnesotans, vital public services, and creates good jobs.

Hundreds then boarded buses to bring the message directly to CEOs, joining protests at the Minneapolis Club, Calhoun Beach Club, and the Lake Street Cub Foods.

“I come from a part of the state that knows that that when we invest in our workers, our schools, our health programs, and our environment, everyone benefits. And that everyone should pay their fair share for those benefits,” said farmer Terry VanDerPol, a cattle producer from Granite Falls and a member of the Land Stewardship Project.

At the Minneapolis Club, 200 people called on Wells Fargo CEO Jon R. Campbell, a member of the club’s Board of Governors and the Chair of the Board of Directors of the Chamber of Commerce, to pay his fair share. Wells Fargo received a taxpayer bailout, made \$12 billion in profits in 2009 and 2010, then laid off more than 300 Twin Cities-area workers this spring.

“Wells Fargo received a bailout, got a huge tax refund, and then turned around and killed jobs for the very same people who made that money possible. Now, they tell us the state is broke and we need to fire teachers, cops and healthcare workers? CEO's and executives like those at Wells Fargo need to do their fair share like the rest of us,” said Kerry Felder, a North Minneapolis education activist and organizer with Neighbors Organizing for Change, whose neighborhood has been hard hit by foreclosures.

Uptown, at the Calhoun Beach Club, more than 200 people sent a message to Medica CEO David Tilford to pay his fair share.

Margaret Uriah of St. Paul told the crowd she was outraged that families like hers are falling through the cracks, being cut off healthcare, and asked to sacrifice more, while legislators choose to shield the richest from paying their fair share. “When CEOs of healthcare companies providing public healthcare, like Medica’s David Tilford, make millions and aren’t asked to pay their fair share in taxes, we have a revenue problem.”

Participants also called for the legislature to reinstate a cap on HMO reserves, which were eliminated in 2004. Medica and the other three biggest HMOs administering public health care programs currently hold more than \$1.5 billion in reserves -- much of it public money. Medica alone holds \$399 million in reserves. Those outside the Calhoun Beach Club said they believe this money should be given back to the people of the state to help balance the budget rather than sitting in corporate coffers.

At the Lake Street Cub Foods, CTUL (Centro de Trabajadores Unidos en Lucha), began an open-ended hunger strike to change the unfair wages and working conditions of workers who clean Cub Foods and other Twin Cities stores.

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For over a year cleaning workers have asked Cub Foods to negotiate a Code of Conduct ensuring fair wages and working conditions for the workers who clean their stores. Ten years ago, many workers who clean Cub Foods made up to \$10-\$11 an hour. Now, most workers make as little as \$7.50 an hour and the workload has doubled. The workers' requests for dialogue with Cub have been ignored and in one incident peaceful protesters and bystanders were pepper-sprayed by Cub security.

"Every night we work in grocery stores and are surrounded by food, yet often many of us cannot even afford to feed our families. I am hunger striking to bring to light the injustices workers face every day cleaning Cub Foods and to call on Cub Foods to meet with us," said Mario Colloly Torres, a former cleaner at Cub Foods and who was fired from his job after the protests against Cub began.

These actions are the beginning of a campaign around the state asking the richest 2 percent to pay their fair share, supporting Governor Dayton's plan for tax fairness in Minnesota.

"There is no budget deficit. The only deficit in our state right now is the deficit of imagination and the deficit of moral clarity," said Grant Stevenson, a Lutheran pastor and President of ISAIAH.