

Progress made in 2009 session, but much more work ahead

Written by MN State Rep. Jeff Hayden
Monday, 15 June 2009 12:35



With too many Minnesotans losing their jobs, health care, and homes, I set out in my first year in the Legislature to fight for the people in our community so that our voices and priorities could be part of our state budget solution. We were able to pass progressive reforms to combat the home foreclosure crisis and broaden health care coverage to more children, but in other important areas, the Governor used his veto power to block the forward thinking reforms we need to emerge stronger from these difficult economic times.

With a record \$6.4 billion budget shortfall, I learned early that it would be difficult to pass legislation that would cost the state additional money. Instead, I spent more efforts working to reform existing government services to prevent catastrophic cuts to schools, to improve health care, and to protect jobs. I was pleased to pass bills I authored, including a bill to combat the home foreclosure crisis that will prevent destruction of foreclosed homes.

The balanced budget the Legislature passed included targeted spending cuts to minimize job losses. We also targeted federal recovery dollars from President Obama's American Recovery and Reinvestment Act to prevent the loss of health care for families, to bolster our education system, and create thousands of new jobs.

In order to preserve basic services, jobs, and the safety net that is so critical in these tough times, the Legislature passed a bill to increase income taxes on the wealthiest Minnesotans. For

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a joint filer earning \$300,000 per year, their taxes would only increase \$109 per year – or \$9 per month. Considering the deep cuts we were facing, it was more than fair to ask the wealthiest Minnesotan to contribute to the budget solution.

The Governor chose to veto our balanced budget by rejecting the income tax increase on the wealthiest Minnesotans. He will instead pursue additional cuts by himself through a process called unallotment.

The Governor's strategy to protect the wealthiest Minnesotans at the expense of the poorest is both morally reprehensible and economically unsound. His cuts will harm some of Minnesota's most vulnerable citizens, lead to greater job losses, increase property taxes, and weaken our long term economic recovery. He has already cut more than \$380 million from General Assistance Medical Care, which will kick over 30,000 low-income, mentally ill, or homeless Minnesotans off of health care in 2010. It will result in a loss of over \$100 million for Hennepin County Medical Center, \$15.5 million at Abbott Northwestern Hospital and \$340,000 at Children's Hospitals and Clinics. We are already seeing job losses at these hospitals as a result of his actions.

The 2009 session may be over, but our work is not. In the coming weeks I will share with you the impact the Governor's unallotments will have on our community and work with community and legislative leaders to build the support needed to present a new vision for the future of our state. That means reversing the Governor's veto of General Assistance Medical Care, reforming our broken health care system, and pursuing proactive solutions to address the home foreclosure crisis.

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It's an honor to serve our community in the Legislature and I encourage you to continue contacting me with your valuable input and ideas. We can and must succeed in our fight for a better way forward, and I hope you will all join me in working together to make the changes Minnesota needs.