

**Minnesota Senate District 59 DFL**  
**2011 Senate Special Election Candidate Questionnaire**  
**Distributed Tuesday November 22 • Due 5:00PM Tuesday November 29**

The following is an informational Questionnaire for all candidates actively campaigning for the MN Senate District 59 DFL Special Primary Election to complete. Candidates: please respond to each question as completely as possible. Please cut and paste each question separately above each response so that each question and response corresponds to one another. Please type your name and contact information at the top of page one of the completed Questionnaire.

**Please submit your completed Questionnaire electronically to Harrison Nelson, SD 59 DFL Chair at: [chair@sd-59.org](mailto:chair@sd-59.org) by the deadline of 5:00PM Tuesday November 29**

The SD 59 DFL will post the full text (verbatim) of each Candidate Questionnaire online for public review prior to the November 30, 2011 Candidate Forum. The SD 59 DFL will also post the Questionnaire questions in advance of the Candidate Forum in order to give the public a sense of what questions candidates will already be addressing to help them narrow the questions they may wish to ask at the Forum. Please be as thorough with your responses as you wish also remembering that those who read your responses are looking for concise, clear information. Thank you for your cooperation in a full effort to educate, inform and empower Senate District 59 voters.

### **Legislative Priorities**

1) Which three committee assignments would you request? Why would you request these three?

Capital Investment – The area has many infrastructure needs/projects. I would work with local government, the University and the community to make sure their projects and concerns are addressed.

Higher Education – The State Senator from this area has the special obligation to be the voice of the University and its students. The district also has students and families struggling to attend post-secondary schools. I want to make sure their all concerns are heard.

Environment and Natural Resources – The Mississippi River is at the heart of a national park, with wildlife migrating through here between South America and Canada. The threat of Asian carp, devouring food sustaining native fish, is very real, and very local. None of the state funding to protect and restore habitat has come to Minneapolis, despite this riverfront's significance.

### **Taxes and Budget**

1) If you had revenues of \$100 (to symbolize the state's budget revenues) how would you allocate those revenues according to your priorities and your understanding of the budget and public priorities (so those priorities add up to \$100)?

In rough terms, half of the current state budget is for education (early childhood, K-12, and higher ed), and another quarter is for health and human services. All other parts of state government are included in the remaining quarter.

I agree that the majority of state funding should go for education.

At some point, after the Affordable Care Act is enacted and functional, which should be in effect for the next biennial budget but probably will not be accurately reflected because of the pending Supreme Court case, the proportion for health and human services could decrease. However, it shouldn't be artificially decreased

but instead should reflect the effect of the ACA. At first, the funds should go to pay off the school shift enacted by the Republican majority in 2011.

2) What is your position on tax policy? What are the relationships between income tax, sales tax, property tax, user fees and other surcharges? If you had to raise revenues how would you do that?

Sales taxes, property taxes and fees/surcharges are regressive forms of taxation. As a state we must move to a progressive tax system where the wealthiest Minnesotans pay their fair share.

## **Education**

1) What are your priorities for early education, special education, K-12 education and higher education? How would you fund them?

It is imperative that we fully fund our schools. While the budget crisis continues in our state, now more than ever we must insure that our students are prepared to join our workforce. A good education is the key to a good job. We can no longer claim that closing the achievement gap is a priority unless we pay for it. No longer can we balance the budget on the backs of our students and teachers. Education should be funded through the state general fund – not levies enacted at the local level.

2) What are your views on investing in early childhood education? How would you pay for those? How would you prioritize this with other educational spending?

Early childhood education must be a cornerstone in our education system. The more we invest in early learning for children the better prepared our students are for grade school. Proficiency at kindergarten entrance is predictive of achievement later in school. We need to increase our investment in early childhood education.

3) The costs of higher education continue to escalate while the resources available to most MN students and families decrease. How do you plan to address the rising cost of higher education with continuing decreases in financial resources especially in a very stressed economy?

Minnesota made a promise to its students and it is our responsibility to fund 66% of Higher Education tuition – we must fulfill that promise. We want students to stay in our state, to buy a home and raise a family here. We must fund higher education and create and attract good jobs to keep our students here. When graduating with ten's of thousands of dollars in debt, and no sign of a solid job - the state loses. We must restore all education funding cuts and invest in our youth.

## **Social Justice and Equity**

1) What is your position on the extension of basic family protections such as health insurance, pension benefits, sick and bereavement pay to unmarried partners and non-biological children of governmental/public employees as currently afforded married heterosexuals?

It's not a question or an issue for debate – it's a basic human right. Families are made up of many sizes, shapes, and structures, and no one has the right to say that one family is better and more deserving of employee benefits than any other. Regardless of what your family looks like - all Minnesotans deserve the same protection under the law.

2) What is your position on the use of Photo ID as a requirement for voting? What changes (if any) would you propose to improve voter participation, and election fairness, efficiency and accuracy?

Requiring a photo ID as a requirement for voting disenfranchises voters. There is no way around it. It is bad for the voters and the state if it becomes law.

Instead, of keeping people from voting, we should enact more ways to enable and encourage people who are entitled to vote to cast that vote. We could enact a 7 or 10 day early voting period when people could vote in one of several places at times that more accurately reflect their busy schedules.

We also should enact recommendations from the Second Chance Coalition that would allow people who leave incarceration to be able to vote upon physically leaving the facility, rather than the current practice of having to wait until they are through with probation. Too many people don't know that they are entitled to vote at that point, and so they don't vote. Or a few people have voted while still on probation, not knowing they were not allowed to vote until they are off paper. In the meantime, when someone is finishing his/her probation period, a probation officer should explain that civil rights are being restored by ending probation and giving a voter registration card. One of the important things a person reentering society should do is reengage productively in the community, and voting is one of the ways they can do so.

## **Health Care**

1) Given that many Minnesotans are without any health care coverage, are underinsured, cannot receive coverage for specific health conditions, or cannot access the proper medications, how would you increase the number of Minnesotans covered and the quality of their coverage? What else would you do to improve the current health insurance climate? How would you pay for that?

Congress finally passed National Health Care Reform through the Affordable Care Act. While not perfect, it is a huge step in the right direction. It was wrong for insurance companies to declare being a woman to be a preexisting condition. I believe that everyone should have access to treatment – regardless of their ability to pay – and I will fight to ensure that the Affordable Care Act is implemented in Minnesota to ensure universal access to quality affordable health care. I will also work with patient groups and Congressman Ellison and Senators Franken and Klobuchar to ensure that the federal government defines a comprehensive and robust essential benefit set.

I support an increase in the tobacco tax that would be used to expand coverage. The 2011 Minnesota Health and Human Services bill repeals the 2% provider tax effective 2014, which I think is a mistake. When the dust settles around the Affordable Care Act and the state must implement the new federal law, we will need some funds to do so, and the provider tax/ Health Care Access Fund (HCAF) would have been an appropriate fund to use for that purpose.

The HCAF and MinnesotaCare have provided access to many Minnesotans who would not otherwise be able to have the healthcare they need. I would support an expansion of MinnesotaCare and Medicare to more families.

The ACA allows children up to age 26 to be covered under their parents' health plan.

1) What would you do to improve the health and living conditions of the elderly, young children and others at risk? How would you pay for that?

We need healthy and livable communities for everyone. Sometimes visits by a social worker, neighborhood volunteers or a non-profit like Minnesota Visiting Nurses Association can stop issues before they escalate. We need to make sure these programs are funded. The top 1% must pay their fair share.

2) What would you do to address the critical problem of access to health insurance for small and microbusinesses?

- Governor Dayton has made the right choice in pursuing an exchange for Minnesota. A federal one size fits all exchange option, which will be imposed if the state does not pass an exchange, is far less attractive than an exchange created for Minnesotans by Minnesotans.

- The GOP is wrong to sit on the sidelines and be a barrier until the Supreme Court case is resolved. The health reform act will become law in 2014, and we have an opportunity to make the exchange and insurance options better for Minnesotans.
- An exchange is like an Expedia or Travelocity for health care: it brings together buyers and sellers. It will help small businesses and uninsured people get health insurance at better prices. Utah, a Republican state, has used an exchange for several years and the customers like it. It is a creative market based solution adopted by government.
- The exchanges and health care reform should be patient centered- not plan (HMO) or insurance company centered. Governor Dayton and Commissioner Rothman appointed a good commission to create the exchange and the basic health care coverage for citizens. It is a solid mix of patient advocates, community leaders and business people.
- The exchange needs an essential benefit package that covers a patient's needs. We cannot expect people to buy insurance and not have it cover anything.
- If insurance companies and HMOs get their way, essential benefit packages will be inadequate. I agree with AG Swanson and Gov. Dayton that coverage needs to be wide and extensive. We do not want consumer to take on massive debt to get treatments, it would defeat the whole idea of health care reform.

### **Economy/Jobs/Small Business**

1) What are the largest hurdles to the greater success of small and microbusiness? How would you lower those hurdles and minimize the barriers to their economic improvement?

Many startup and second stage companies lack the resources, access to information, and high end technical assistant needed to grow to the next level. I would support programs like Hennepin County's Open to Business and Economic Gardening that provide assistance to small and microbusinesses.

2) In the context of *job creation*, where are nearly all U.S. jobs (since 2002) being created?

Many refer to the last 10 years as the lost decade for American workers. There has been zero net job creation since December 1999. When adjusted for inflation, middle income workers made less in 2008 than in 1999.

In MN, construction and manufacturing employment decreased over 36% from 2000 to 2010. Only employment in education and health services increased more than 10%.

3) What is Minnesota's role in the global economy? What would you propose to support your position and serve the best interests of the Minnesota economy and Minnesotan's?

Before Minnesota can have an active role in the global economy we must fix the problems within our state. Fortunately, we are in a prime position to do so. By investing in green and new technologies we can create jobs here in Minnesota, that can be exported and play a role in the global economy.

### **Public Safety and Crime Prevention**

1) What is your position on the availability of guns and particularly handguns? What is your position on the use of background checks prior to the purchase of firearms? Do you support periodic checks of current license holders?

We need to stop the culture of violence and gun violence in the inner city. I support the use of background checks prior to purchase of firearms. At a minimum, we need to make sure that those who aren't supposed to be carrying guns do not have guns or permits to carry them.

2) What specific legislation would you propose to reduce crime? What types of legislation would you propose to aid in the prevention of crime?

The surge in the number and kinds of artificial drugs and their use especially by young people is concerning. I would be author a bill to ban their sale and use. In addition we need to restore funding for Local Government Aid so that our cities and counties can invest in more crime prevention specialists, whose jobs include working with residents on ensuring safety in the neighborhoods. They do individual safety assessments of homes, teach communities on safe behavior, looking out for neighbors, protective lighting, and more.

Lastly, we need to invest in our children. We must find creative solutions to keep kids engaged – one such program being after school activities. When our children have constructive ways to spend their time they are less likely to commit crimes.

3) What is your position regarding Second Chance programs and opportunities for ex-offenders to reenter the community while balancing those initiatives with public safety and media influences?

Funding for reentry is badly needed. Organizations such as The Network for Better Futures (“The Network”) do a good job helping men re-entering society find jobs and housing, provide healthcare, and counseling on the importance of paying child support and staying clean and sober. I have been a strong supporter of The Network since its inception and worked with them to find private sector and public sector jobs for their participants. It’s unfortunate that the 2011 Public Safety bill cut funding for The Network.

Without a structure such as this, too many people find themselves getting in trouble again and returning to incarceration. The wraparound services that organizations like The Network provide are crucial to offenders’ reentry success. Organizations and programs like The Network actually reduce the economic and social costs for high risk adults by moving them into tax paying jobs. We improve public safety and create healthier lives.

Another innovative initiative I support is Hennepin County’s Freedom Ticket. Finding a job in this economy is tough for anyone but almost impossible for those leaving a correctional facility. Freedom Ticket is a partnership between the Library and Community Corrections to expand access to information and resources to improve skills and increase chances of a successful reentry.

## **Environmental Safety/Energy Policy**

1) How would you balance the interests of citizens and the environmental community with the interests of industry, finance and the business community?

We must find ways to create jobs – that said, we can’t do that at the detriment of our environment. There is a balance and we must find it. As Senator, I will work to insure our state does both.

2) What is your position on energy, the use of alternative and renewable energy sources, and Minnesota’s role in this arena? What key resources does Minnesota have to make good progress?

Minnesota has been national leader in renewable energy standards, however we can do more. We have great resources here in the state to grow and develop alternative fuel sources. In addition, we can use those resources to create manufacturing jobs here in Minnesota.

3) What policies or programs would you support in the areas of state building code compliance with clean energy technology, improved energy efficiency and increased noise protection?

Code compliance has traditionally been a safety issue should also be looked at as a tool to improve energy efficiency. We need to have adequate resources and training to implement and enforce the process. We need to establish partnerships to make sure the process is robust, works and generates savings.

## **Transportation**

1) What are your Minnesota transportation priorities as they relate to business, freight, travelers, and public transit including commuters, seniors, people with disabilities, young people, and visitors?

We need to be able to move people and goods easily, efficiently and safely throughout the region via an integrated transportation system. Connecting workers to jobs, students to schools, and everyone to food and entertainment opportunities is vital to our economy.

Public transit is a key component. We need to provide mobility options to seniors, young people and people with disabilities so they stay connected to the community.

I have also been involved in planning and support continued planning studies for Northern Lights Express high speed passenger service between Minneapolis and Duluth.

2) What is your position on light rail transit? How would you play for light rail transit expansion if you feel it's needed?

I am a strong supporter of transit and have been actively working with residents and neighborhoods to expand transit options in the Metro area including planning for Central Corridor, Southwest LRT, Bottineau Transitway, and the Minneapolis Interchange. Light rail transit allows users to move efficiently and safely, mitigating congestion, enhancing economic development and improving environmental stability for the region. We need to have transit options if we want our region to compete economically with other areas in the US.

The Counties Transit Improvement Board (CTIB) currently have utilized a quarter-cent sales tax and \$20 a motor vehicle sales tax, permitted by the Legislature, to invest in and advance transit projects by awarding annual capital and operating grants.

## **Your Candidacy**

Explain why you are seeking the office of Minnesota State Senator. What will you bring to your constituents? What experiences, expertise and skill sets do you have that make you best suited to hold this position? What specific expertise will you bring to the State Senate that is unique or rare to the body?

I am running for State Senate because I know how far reaching state government is and I've seen how state policies impact real people. I've talked to students who are leaving college with huge debt concerned about getting a job; I've talked to seniors worried if they can afford to stay in their home because of rising property taxes; and I've talked to parents worried about their kids future. I'm running because I want to make sure our state policies move the state forward.

I understand governing involves listening to concerns, negotiating, and finding creative solutions. I've done. I've worked with the community to address many issues. My private sector and public sector experience gives me the knowledge to help get the state back on track