

**Susan Allen**  
State Representative  
District 62B  
Minneapolis  
Hennepin County



# Minnesota House of Representatives

## Rep. Susan Allen's 2017 Legislative Summary Letter

July 2017

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

The 2017 regular and first special sessions are now over. **First, I want to invite you to join Rep. Karen Clark and me for a Capitol Reception on Saturday, July 22, 2017 from 10:00am-12:00 pm in the House Chamber on the second floor of the Capitol Building.** You'll have a chance to ask questions about the issues you care about and see the fully restored Capitol building, which is now complete. I hope you can join me then, and with this year's initial legislative activity concluded I want to share some of the accomplishments and disappointments of what occurred during the 2017 legislative session, and update you on the developing court debate regarding funding the legislature in 2018.

After a week-long special session at the end of May, Governor Dayton signed into law all of the major budget and tax bills written by Republican legislators this year. There were many harmful policy provisions and cuts pushed by Republicans that Governor Dayton was able to negotiate out of the final budget bills, but he still signed the budget bills with great reservations. He also line-item vetoed funding for the Legislature in hopes of securing legislative cooperation in addressing his remaining concerns, including: provisions denying driver's licenses for undocumented immigrants; irresponsibly large tax cuts for big tobacco; estate tax cuts for a few hundred of the wealthiest Minnesotans; and changes to teacher licensure that will weaken the profession in the long-term. The Republican leaders of the legislature also failed to protect the state's long-term fiscal health by enacting numerous giveaways to special interests. The constitutionality of vetoing legislative funding is currently being taken up in state court.

It is important to note that not everything that happened this year was bad. There were some small victories for our community, but I think overall the outcomes of this legislative session can be summarized as disappointing. The fact that the 2017 legislative session didn't do significant harm to all of us, doesn't mean the Legislature did everything within its power to lift up all Minnesotans using our strong budget surplus.

In February it was announced that the state would have a projected \$1.65 billion surplus, and I was hopeful this could be a productive session—one that would provide increased funding for basic health, nutrition, housing, transit and other needed investments to help solve problems facing many families in our district to build a better future for everyone. That did not happen. Instead, an agenda was enacted that put the interests of corporations, big tobacco and the wealthy first, further widening inequality between the wealthy and people struggling to secure and maintain regular employment that pays a living wage.

All of that said, there are a few accomplishments. It has been important for me to focus on creating and maintaining good paying jobs, improving access to good education and healthcare for all of our neighbors, and enhancing and maintaining the public infrastructure and transit on which we all depend. A bipartisan capital investment package passed this year totaling \$988 million, which will complete many important projects in our community and throughout the state. The capital investment bill, or bonding bill, is a critical tool leveraging our collective borrowing power as a state to improve critical state and regional infrastructure and the physical assets of institutions that the public depends on. There was no statewide bonding bill passed in 2016, so passing a bill this year was critically important to make progress on the backlog of projects before interest rates increase even more. Here are some of the ways the City of Minneapolis will benefit from this public investment:



- Statewide Affordable Housing and Homeless Infrastructure (MHFA) - \$77 million
- Minneapolis 10th Avenue Bridge - \$31.875 million
- I-35 W - Lake Street Transit Access - \$25.0 million
- Minneapolis Veterans Home Truss Bridge - \$7.851 million
- Minneapolis Pioneers and Soldiers Cemetery Fence - \$1.029 million
- The Family Partnership - \$1.6 million
- The People's Center - \$2.2 million
- Minneapolis Norway House - \$5 million
- Hennepin Center for the Arts - \$3.0 million
- Minneapolis American Indian Center - \$155,000 (renovation predesign)
- South Minneapolis Workforce Center Asset Preservation - \$1.342 million
- U of M - Health Sciences Education Facility (Medical School) - \$66.667 million

There was nothing specific to the construction of Southwest LRT in the bonding bill, but the accompanying 2017 Transportation Bill did not prohibit light rail construction like Republicans had tried to do initially. This, along with our fight to stop bus service cuts, was a victory for Governor Dayton and transit users. Metro transit bus service would have been cut by 40% under the original transportation bill that was vetoed by the Governor. However, Hennepin County is now responsible for 100% of operating costs once light rail projects are complete. Normally, the state pays 50% of costs.

Other accomplishments of note: an increase in the per pupil school funding formula of 2% each of the next two years; an expansion of the Working Family Credit; improvements to the Child and Dependent Care Credit; a first of its kind urban agriculture program that will provide competitive grants to urban farmers statewide, with a priority for low-income communities of color and Indigenous communities; a Department of Health budget increase of \$12 million for home visiting services for pregnant and parenting teens; and \$46.3 million for grants to support Minnesota artists and arts organizations.

One other positive outcome of this session was the formation of the POCI Caucus, of which I am a member. POCI stands for "People of Color & Indigenous" and we are now 13 members strong, consisting of Indigenous, African American, Somali, Hmong, and Latino members of the House and Senate. Throughout the session, we worked closely together and with the Governor's administration to lobby against Republican efforts to obstruct the rights of workers to pursue a \$15 minimum wage under a preemption bill (vetoed by Governor Dayton) and enact discriminatory policies like anti-protester legislation. We successfully fought against attempts to eliminate full environmental review of pipelines in Minnesota that threaten our wild rice waters. We worked together on many other bills to improve outcomes in the areas of housing, employment, education, environmental protections and civil rights for Indigenous Minnesotans and Minnesotans of Color, including legislation to fund Dakota/Ojibwe language instruction in the Legacy bill, continued funding for Bureau of Indian Education schools and expansion of the Working Family Tax Credit to include eligible tribal members living and working on an Indian reservation.

Despite these accomplishments, far more was left by the wayside. Nowhere were those missed opportunities more evident than in the Legislature's failure to enact a comprehensive, multimodal transportation plan with ongoing, dedicated funding to bolster Minnesota's transportation system. Instead, the Legislature raided the state's general fund to pay for a limited number of transportation initiatives – thereby putting our schools, nursing homes, and other vital public services in direct competition with our transportation system for scarce financial resources.

Since a recent Department of Transportation study estimates the state highway system has a funding gap of \$600 million per year over ten years, and a corresponding statewide transit gap of \$3 billion over ten years, I am very disappointed that this pressing need was not comprehensively addressed via long-term, dedicated funding sources. If we are to position our state to be economically competitive, it is imperative that we do so, especially by making strong investments in transit to get riders to work, school and doctor appointments.

The Legislature also missed critical opportunities to help Minnesotans struggling to enter the middle class. Even though efforts were made by DFL legislators, including myself, to use our surplus to expand programs that help lift families out of poverty, Republicans blocked these initiatives. Some of those Republican-blocked provisions included a public option to access healthcare through a MinnesotaCare buy-in; an increase in General Assistance (which I authored); a more robust

increase in childcare assistance to help working families; the effort to pass statewide paid family leave and earned sick and safe time; and all efforts to freeze public college tuition and reduce the burden of increasing student debt.

Other shortcomings this year, include a \$1.2 million increase in the estate tax exemption for the financially well-to-do; business property tax cuts, but no corresponding direct property tax relief for homeowners and renters; shortchanging our higher education campuses and students who now face tuition increases; tax cuts on premium tobacco products; and failing to enact internet privacy protections that would have prohibited Internet Service Providers from selling your personal data without your permission.

For my part, I want to assure you that as the debate about legislative funding continues in the courts my priorities are unwavering. I am committed to: standing against hateful policies that would marginalize Indigenous and people of color, immigrants and non-citizens, minimum wage workers, women, children and the incarcerated; building a world class E-12 education system for all kids; improving access to affordable housing and healthcare; making college more affordable and reducing student debt; fostering an economy conducive to job creation; investing in transit for all; protecting our state's environment and natural resources; funding for the arts and arts organizations; improving workplace conditions for employees; and ensuring that Minnesota's budget practices are structurally sound and fair.

I am committed to working for the good of our community and our state, and I am committed to doing it with anyone who will join me in that fight. Minnesota is at its best when we all work together to promote economic fairness and put the interests of all Minnesotans first. That's what I've always done, and I am particularly proud of the people in our District 62B who called, wrote or came to meet with me at the State Office Building. Others arranged to meet with me out in our district's neighborhoods. I was especially pleased by the broad and consistent efforts many put forward to draft, amend, and protest harmful anti-protester bills, anti-worker "preemption" legislation, and irresponsible "shoot first" gun laws. Together, we were able to put pressure on lawmakers and the Governor to stop these bills or veto them.

**Thank you for taking time to review this information about the work of the 2017 Legislature.** I want to take this opportunity to let you know that while I share your disappointments with the 2017 session, I continue to be focused on going forward with your continued support and activism. It is truly an honor and a privilege to represent and serve you in the Minnesota House of Representatives. Please feel free to contact me at either my office (651) 296-7152 or by email at [rep.susan.allen@house.mn](mailto:rep.susan.allen@house.mn)

Sincerely



Susan Allen

State Representative –*District 62B*

PS - A reminder not to forget about submitting your **property tax and family tax credits by August 15, 2017.**

For information on **Renter's Credit:** 651-296-3781 **Homestead Credit:** 651-296-3781

**Working Family Credit:** 651-297-3724 or 1-800-657-3989 **Childcare Tax Credit:** 651-296-3781 or 1-800-652-9094



*Left: This spring I joined my colleagues Rep. Peggy Flanagan and Rep. Mary Kunesh-Podein at the 'Powwow for Hope', along with US Senator Amy Klobuchar, to raise awareness about special health concerns for Native American women and families.*

*Right: The four Native American women of the House of Representatives and the POCI Caucus (l to r) Rep. Mary Kunesh-Podein, Rep. Susan Allen, Rep. Jamie Becker-Finn and Rep. Peggy Flanagan. In 2017 more indigenous and people of color are serving in the legislature than ever before in Minnesota history.*



*Left: In May, LGBT legislators took a moment to celebrate the anniversary of marriage equality for all Minnesotans in 2013. Here I am pictured with newly elected Rep. Erin Maye-Quade, Sen. Scott Dibble, myself and Rep. Karen Clark.*