



NEWS FROM
STATE SENATOR PAUL GAZELKA

SERVING THE COUNTIES OF MORRISON, TODD, WADENA AND CASS

Dear Friends,

It is my pleasure to wish you all a Happy New Year. I hope you enjoyed your holidays and had a Merry Christmas with family and friends. As the 2015 Legislative Session gets underway I wanted to get in touch with you and ask for your thoughts and opinions as we begin to move forward.

There are serious issues facing Minnesota. Over the last two years Democrats have passed the largest budget and the largest tax increase in Minnesota's history. Now we have an opportunity to reform our tax laws to provide some relief to hardworking taxpayers. Hardworking Minnesotans deserve relief after their sacrifices over the last two years.

Our vision is simple. We are in a position to embrace bold reforms that change the way we manage our schools, health care, and our roads. I believe we can make Minnesota a more welcoming place for families and business owners if we are all willing to work together and support new, innovative ideas and put aside our partisan differences. At the end of the day, we're all in this together.

As the session begins to ramp up, my focus will be on several key issues I believe are important to Minnesota. My first bill introduction was a bill to exempt retired members of the United States Military from Minnesota state income tax. Although it did not pass, I'm confident we will be successful in passing it this year.

Another very important issue will be addressing the Freedom of Conscience Act and working with key Democrats and Republicans to protect the rights of Minnesotans who would otherwise be forced, against their religious beliefs, to provide services for same-sex marriages. In Morrison County last year a small business owner was asked to provide services for a marriage and reception for a same-sex-couple and because it violated religious principals they deeply believe in they couldn't in good conscience provide services to support the ceremony. As a result they were threatened with a lawsuit in which they settled by having to pay for the couple's ceremony, reception and honeymoon. Their only alternative for exercising their rights were to risk losing the lawsuit as well as their business. I've always believed it's important to respect others beliefs but we must also acknowledge and support the rights of everyone, regardless of whether or not we agree.

On a related note, the Minnesota State High School League voted in December on a policy change regarding transgender students. An initial proposal MSHSL was considering was to allow private facilities such as bathrooms and locker rooms to be accessed by opposite-sex students. Though what was passed in December is a less intrusive policy than the original, does MSHSL really expect a biological male student who identifies as female, and his family, to acquiesce to the student being permitted to play on the girls basketball team on Thursday night, but not be permitted to access that team's locker rooms after the game, or the female bathrooms when he returns to school on Friday morning? As a direct result, the new transgender policy poses serious concerns regarding privacy rights, and compromises fairness in athletic competition as well.

I will address many other issues as the session continues and will continue to inform you as I do. In the meantime, I absolutely value your input and opinions and I look forward to any suggestions you have for me, and for the 2015 legislature.

Warmest Regards,

Senator Paul Gazelka