



NEWS FROM
STATE SENATOR PAUL GAZELKA

SERVING THE COUNTIES OF MORRISON, TODD, WADENA AND CASS

Dear Friends,

Reinforcing our children’s safety and privacy at school

On Monday, Senate Republicans introduced the “Student Safety and Physical Privacy Act” to address serious concerns regarding a controversial new policy from the Minnesota State High School League (MSHSL).

Last December, the MSHSL issued a new ruling allowing transgender students to play on a sports team other than the team of the student’s biological sex. In effect, it allows male students who identify as female to play on female sports teams.

The ruling was met with resistance from parents and families who were worried about what effect it would have on locker room and shower situations, and how the ruling would impact private and nonpublic schools. Before the final vote on the policy, the MSHSL was presented with a petition of 6,000 names opposing the changes, but the Board proceeded to adopt the plan anyway.

In addition to parent apprehension, the ruling also appears to be in conflict with state statutes.

The “Student Safety and Physical Privacy Act,” which has been assigned [Senate File 1543](#), clarifies state law and sends a message to parents that we are listening to their concerns. It is a common sense bill that protects students’ basic safety and privacy rights by codifying what high schools are already doing. It simply defines who is eligible to participate on school sports teams and requires that schools maintain facilities like bathrooms and locker rooms that are separated based on biological sex. Schools will be able to continue to meet the needs of individual students who are uncomfortable using the facility that corresponds with their biological sex by offering access to a private facility.

I support this bill because it is clear Minnesota families are unhappy with the Board’s decision. A recent statewide poll from Public Opinion Strategies showed only 29 percent of respondents supported the MSHSL ruling, while 76 percent support the changes in our bill. As a father, I share your concerns about the policy. The “Student Safety and Physical Privacy Act” addresses the needs of transgender students while continuing to protect every student’s safety and privacy.

Budget surplus raises the question: Were tax increases even necessary?

Minnesota Management and Budget office released their February economic forecast. The report showed an additional \$832 million soon to be collected in the state's bank account, bringing the total budget surplus to \$1.8 billion. The report also noted that much of the surplus is due to lower oil prices providing a boost to the economy.

Two years ago, we were told we had to raise taxes in order to eliminate the deficit. Now we have a surplus about the same size as that tax hike, which raises the question: **Did we even need to raise taxes in the first place?** It is clear government collected too much money, and we should return it to hardworking people like you. Senate Republicans have already offered a series of proposals to cut taxes for veterans, seniors, and families. I'll continue to support ideas to lower the tax burden on Minnesotans who are paying too much.

One thing I can say for sure is any talk of a gas tax increase should be off the table. Nobody can say with a straight face that we need to raise gas taxes while the state has \$1.8 billion in the bank. An increase to the gas tax will make it more expensive for you to buy groceries and household items, since everyday products will cost more to transport. I'm committed to fixing our roads and bridges, but first we need to get our spending priorities in order, put an end to wasteful projects like the \$90 million Senate office building, and work with money we already have.

Property taxes going up for 87% of MN counties in 2015

Local governments will collect an extra \$286 million in property taxes in 2015, a 3.4% average increase statewide. Unfortunately, this contradicts the promises made by the previous legislature to decrease property taxes, which was part of their argument for passing a \$2 billion tax increase. Out of that \$2 billion tax increase, an extra \$100 million is being sent to local governments yearly, but the gamble isn't paying off for most homeowners. 87% of the counties in Minnesota will be paying higher taxes, as well as many cities and towns in our own district.

For more detail, a downloadable table of property tax increases by county, city, town, and school district can be found [here](#).

Regardless of how much money the state collects and doles back out, the legislature has little control over local property taxes. As your representative in St. Paul, my goal is to keep your state tax burden low so you can spend more of your money on the things that matter to your family.

Taxes

This was a full week of hearings in both the Senate Tax Committee, as well as the Tax Reform Division. Of note were a series of education related tax relief proposals. As a follow-up to last year's successful effort to enact a reading income tax credit, Sen. Chamberlain continued his focus on providing on-going tax relief for families dealing with the education needs of children with dyslexia. SF 271 seeks to extend the tax credit for another five years, increase the maximum credit from \$2,000 to \$3,000, and modify eligibility so that families in need can actually utilize

the tax relief. Another education proposal included SF 304 offered by Sen. Nelson that would expand eligibility for the current K-12 tax credit and deductions and allow expenses for qualifying pre-k programs. Also considered by the committee was a proposal by Sen. Pratt (SF 1109) that would provide a refundable tax credit for K-12 teachers who obtain a master's degree in a core content field in which they provide instruction. All of these proposals were laid over by the committee for further consideration.

Education

The Senate Education Committee drew considerable interest and testimony when it took up a House-passed bill, HF 2, that would reform the last-in-first-out (LIFO) teacher layoff process (so that performance would be taken into account) and included several other measures intended to streamline entry into the teaching profession for qualified individuals (such as expanding the use of "Community Experts," who can teach without a formal license). The bill was set-aside for possible inclusion in a Senate omnibus education policy bill, which is expected to be released and acted on by the end of next week. Also before the Committee was the Governor's proposed education policy bill (HF 1495), which included several technical updates and also a significant provision on student testing. Under HF 1495, the number of years that statewide tests would be administered during grades 3-8 would be reduced from six to just two. Additionally, HF 1495 provides several ways for students/families to choose not to participate in the remaining tests. The Minnesota Business Partnership raised a strong objection to this measure because it would undermine information on school and student performance for families, taxpayers, and Legislators. The bill remains under consideration in the Committee.