



Senator Karla Bigham

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2020 SESSION REPORT



Dear Neighbors:

The regular legislative session began with a \$1.6 billion dollar surplus and the goal of passing a robust bonding bill to invest in our state's infrastructure. In March, the COVID-19 pandemic completely upended our lives, economy, and the 2020 legislative session. Our state was further rocked by the senseless murder of George Floyd and protests against police misconduct across Minnesota.

Despite these challenges, Minnesotans came together to take care of one another. As your State Senator, the health and safety of each member of our community – and the right to feel safe in their own community - is my highest priority. This year we worked to respond to these challenges, invested in our health care workers, and pushed for meaningful reforms.

There is so much more to be done, and I look forward to working with my colleagues in the legislature as well as with Governor Walz to get us through these crises.

Sincerely,

Karla Bigham
Senator Karla Bigham

Special Session Update

The Minnesota Senate adjourned the Special Session after one week of floor session debates. The Senate unanimously passed emergency small business grants. The bill sent more than \$60 million in grants to businesses affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The money will be equitably disbursed regionally across Minnesota, and the bill allocates funds to micro-businesses and businesses that are veteran, women, and minority owned. This move by the Minnesota legislature fills a gap created by the federal CARES Act that focused on S-Corporations, sole proprietors, and LLC companies.

Several other provisions successfully passed through the Senate. Telemedicine used for health care, mental health, and substance use disorder treatments is now permissible past a Peacetime Emergency Order. An increase in payment rates for the state's child care assistance program was approved. A distance learning access grant program was established to provide wireless or wire-lined broadband to students currently without internet access. Money was also provided to Minnesota schools to address reading curriculum and training.

Special Session ended without an agreement on how to move forward on important issues affecting Minnesota. A bonding bill, distributing the federal CARES Act funding, and meaningful action on criminal justice reform failed to pass the legislature.

A bonding bill must originate in the House before making its way to the Senate. The House failed to pass a bonding bill this year because it did not have the Republican votes to approve the legislation. A bonding bill is an investment in our infrastructure that would help Minnesota's economy and create jobs.

Local units of government also needed the legislature to fairly distribute the federal CARES Act funding. Passing the federal CARES Act bill would ensure our communities are not left on the hook for COVID-19 related expenses.

Finally, tens of thousands of Minnesotans marched in the streets throughout the state calling for policing and criminal justice reforms. The legislature failed to answer the demands of our communities by leaving all of these critical items incomplete.

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Prescription Drug Transparency



The drug transparency act was passed which will require drug manufacturers to report drug prices that increase over certain thresholds to the Department of Health.

While this is an important step, we need to make more meaningful reforms to reduce the costs of prescription drugs.

Insulin Affordability

After failing to pass in the final days of the 2019 session, this year we were able to pass the Alec Smith Insulin Affordability Act. The act is named after Alec Smith who died in 2017 at the young age of 26 after being forced to ration his insulin due to the extremely high costs. This bill makes insulin available for eligible individuals who are in urgent need of insulin and limits the amount of the copay to \$35. Along with emergency insulin, each manufacturer must also maintain an ongoing patient assistance program for qualifying individuals. This bill would not have been possible without the tireless work of Alec's parents and all the advocates who fought for this issue.

Education

We passed an Education bill to help our schools respond to issues stemming from COVID-19. This bill included budget flexibility for schools to ensure that students could receive nutritious meals, summer learning, and child care for families of first responders. During special session we passed a modest education policy bill including vaping prevention requirements, preschool screening and suspension changes, and special education assessment.

Environment

I'm proud to support bipartisan legislation that prioritized renewable energy and directed assistance to communities that are losing power plants as they come offline. The Senate passed legislation providing \$25.8 million in funding for the state's Renewable Development Account (RDA). The RDA provides funding to develop renewable energy projects throughout the state. Governor Walz signed this into law on May 27, 2020.

The Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR) bill appropriates constitutionally dedicated lottery money to many worthy environmental projects around the state. I authored this legislation in the Senate, so it was disappointing when it failed to pass, leaving \$64 million and over two hundred jobs on the table. We need this now more than ever, and I will continue to pursue this issue in the future.

One of my top priorities is to advance legislation to combat the threats posed by per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) to our environment and public health. These are chemicals that have been used in industry and consumer products worldwide since the 1950s. They are used in non-stick cookware, water-repellent clothing, stain resistant fabrics and carpets, firefighting foams, and products that resist grease, water, and oil. I am sponsoring bills to:

- Ban the manufacturing, distribution, and sale of food packaging that contains PFAS chemicals.
- Create a PFAS task force to gather and review information about locations where PFAS substances have been detected, and to develop response strategies and goals for reduction of PFAS contamination.
- Direct the University of Minnesota to use its expertise to determine the health impacts on our community from potential exposure to PFAS substances. This legislation requires listening sessions with community members and key stakeholders, would create a more complete picture of the potential health risks to community members from exposure to PFAS, and advances the overall understanding of the health risks of PFAS.

COVID-19 Response and the Minnesota Senate

The arrival of COVID-19 upended business as usual in our country and world. This was no different for the Senate, where for the first time in our history we allowed remote voting and conducted virtual committee hearings.

Though certain priorities got tangled in partisan disputes, the DFL-controlled House, GOP-controlled Senate, and Governor Walz worked together to pass legislation and policies protecting the health and wellbeing of Minnesotans in our response to this crisis.

As we passed relief measures, it became clear that we must eliminate cost barriers to testing for COVID-19. Senate DFLers insisted that the costs of testing be waived by health

care providers, ensuring Minnesotans who needed a test would get one.

We also passed relief for small businesses. This included loans totaling \$30 million for businesses directly impacted by Governor Walz's Executive Order and another \$10 million to help small businesses impacted by COVID-19 but do not qualify for a Small Business Administration disaster assistance loan.

As COVID-19 restricted in-person activities, people trying to get a marriage license needed help. I led the efforts to allow marriage applications to be accepted by mail, fax, or electronic filing which was included in a package of Judiciary Committee relief bills.