

Summary of Meeting with State Rep. Mindy Greiling

Civic Caucus, 8301 Creekside Circle, Bloomington, MN 55437

<http://civiccaucus.org>

Friday, April 24, 2009

Guest speaker: State Rep. Mindy Greiling, Chair, House K-12 Education Finance Division

Present: Verne C. Johnson, chair; David Broden, Paul Gilje, Jim Hetland, Dan Loritz, Jim Olson (by phone), and Wayne Popham (by phone)

A. Context of the meeting--The Civic Caucus has held several meetings on issues of change in education. Today we're receiving an update on legislation from the House chief author of the K-12 funding bill.

B. Welcome and introduction--Verne and Paul welcomed and introduced **State Rep. Mindy Greiling**, Roseville, chair, House K-12 Education Finance Division. Before being elected to the Legislature, Greiling, now in her 8th two-year term, served in many local occupational and volunteer capacities, including serving as an elementary teacher in the St. Paul Public Schools, girl scout leader, PTA president, Roseville School Board member and chair; and president, Roseville League of Women Voters. She has a B.A. degree in education from Gustavus Adolphus College, and an M.A. in education from the University of Minnesota.

C. Comments and discussion--During Greiling's comments and in discussion with the Civic Caucus the following points were raised:

1. Re-establish the State Planning Agency and the State Board of Education--Responding to a question about the Civic Caucus recommendations on transportation leadership, Greiling said she has been a fan of long range planning and was disappointed when the State Planning Agency and the State Board of Education were abolished. The Legislative Auditor has become increasingly important in providing some information with value similar to what had been generated by the State Planning Agency.

She said she hasn't seen much interest by the Governor's office in promoting planning and process.

2. People want their buses--Responding to another question about transportation, Greiling said that people in the Twin Cities area are more interested in good bus service than in more highway lanes. She hears more complains about areas where bus service isn't available than any other transportation concern.

3. Support for district-created site-governed schools--The omnibus education bill being passed by the House includes enabling legislation that allows

individual school districts to set up their own site-governed schools. A school board, if it so chooses, could establish charter-type schools within its own structure. In effect, a school district could compete with charter schools that are set up without school district approval. This legislation is being backed by Education|Evolving.

4. Importance of innovation revenue--Greiling said she is very optimistic about one section of the House bill, which she called the "centerpiece", that provides \$375 per pupil in innovation revenue that is tied to student achievement. The bill requires a school district to use at least 5 percent of its new basic revenue for innovative revenue programs including peer-reviewed, research-based measures to improve academic performance. It requires a district that is demonstrating low student growth to submit a plan to the commissioner of education describing how it intends to use its innovation revenue.

5. Establishing a framework for a new "Minnesota Miracle"--While the bill essentially freezes basic revenue for each school district, in light of current economic realities, it includes language that is intended to implement in 2014, a significant change in school aids to resemble improvements that occurred when the 1971 Legislature largely made it possible for every school district to receive equitable and adequate funding based on equal local effort. Among new changes will be providing the same funding for all students, K-12.

6. Whether school aids and local government aids should be settled in the same conference committee--It was noted that a frequently overlooked aspect of the 1971 legislation is that school aids and local government aids (LGA) were settled in the same conference committee. That approach enabled legislators to make finer adjustments than are possible when school aids and LGA are settled separately. Such an approach doesn't seem to have been followed since 1971. Greiling replied that she represents cities that don't receive LGA. She would like very much if trade-offs could be made between school aid and LGA.

7. Question of constitutional amendment for education revenue--A Civic Caucus member asked whether--in light of a stand-off between the Legislature and Governor on tax increases--the Legislature might just by-pass the Governor and submit a constitutional amendment to the voters on a tax increase for education. It was noted that voters in 2008 approved a legislatively-submitted amendment that increased revenue for water, outdoors, and the arts. Greiling said she is opposed to such an approach. Minnesota doesn't want to become like California where something like 3/4 of the state's budget is controlled by voter referendums. She senses no movement whatsoever for a constitutional amendment for schools. The people want the Governor and Legislature to reach a compromise. Moreover, the Legislature doesn't consider such amendments until the second year of the biennium.

8. Support for customized learning--Responding to a question about greater use of computers to provide customized learning, Greiling said she has read Clayton Christensen's book *Disrupting Class*. A modest provision to support on-line learning is

included in the House bill, she said. She senses more support for on-line that provide essential supplements for some students, instead of replacing teachers with on-line learning.

9. Possibilities for changes in elections structure--Greiling said she favors assigning the responsibility for legislative redistricting to a non-partisan commission. She supports the precinct caucus system, because it still offers a way for candidates with limited funds to receive party endorsement. She favors a presidential preference primary being conducted separate from precinct caucus meetings. She favors advancing the state primary election to a date earlier than September.

10. Adjusting to changes in media coverage--Fewer journalists are covering the Legislature now, Greiling said. Also, newspaper editorial boards don't seem to be pressuring the Legislature to the degree that was present in the past. We're suffering in general from a lack of good civic discussion, she said. Greiling said her daughter is employed by Bloomberg News in Washington, D.C., which seems to be a rare model for better coverage today.

11. Possible changes in schools of education--It was noted that some previous Civic Caucus interviews have included questions about whether schools of education are adequately preparing teachers for emerging roles. Greiling said she'd be happy to have such issues part of the discussion.

12. Thanks--On behalf of the Civic Caucus, Verne thanked Greiling for meeting with us today.

D. Civic Caucus discussion--Civic Caucus members briefly discussed the tax-revenue debate between the Governor and Legislature. Broadening the base as distinguished from increasing tax rates doesn't seem to have received as much discussion as would seem appropriate, one member said. For example, it's hard to figure out why extending the sales tax to clothing and services hasn't received more attention.