

Investing in Minnesota's Future: A Call to Action
A Report by the 2006 Minority Political Summit
Friday October 20th, 2006

On October 2, 2006 over 100 minority community leaders and experts and others gathered together at the Cowles Auditorium of the Humphrey Institute of the University of Minnesota to identify top priorities and encourage political leaders, especially candidates aspiring for public office in Minnesota, to incorporate these priorities in their political platforms. This was a historic occasion – perhaps the first time a multiethnic group crafted a policy document on priorities important to them.

Today we gather here to call for a new paradigm in Minnesota: Look at these priorities as investment in Minnesota's future for the following reasons:

- Minorities are going to make up a greater share of the future workforce
- Minorities currently make up a critical number of the workforce at both the high skill and essential workers
- Minorities are going to make up a greater share of the future tax base and funders of social entitlement programs
- Minority firms are one of the fastest growing segments of the local economies at the state, city and regional level
- Minority consumers represent a buying power of over 12 billion dollars – greater than the GDP of over 50 countries in the world including Afghanistan.

Today we challenge our political leaders – Develop policies and programs that reflect the unique needs of your constituents.

In the business world successful marketers know that one size does not fit all and that there are great returns to investment if you customize your products to the clients you serve. Why are our policy makers not applying these principles in the public arena?

We identify below the unique needs of minority communities in a number of areas identified in the Summit.

Education that is accessible and affordable, but also

- Raise the bar of educational standards for minorities by increasing their graduation in STEM disciplines and moving them away from educational programs with low expectations and poor quality. Increase minority enrollment in PSEO, AP and IB programs.
- Culturally competent teachers, staff and administrators with adequate representation of minorities in these areas
- Curriculum that includes the intellectual and other contributions of Native Americans and minority communities.
- Outreach to minority parents to enable them to better access the educational system from preschool to college for their children.
- Financial assistance to minorities for ACT exams and college access programs
- Opportunities for career track internships and apprenticeship.

- Offer in state tuition to any student who lives in Minnesota and attended high school in Minnesota.

Minority Business like all other businesses would benefit from lower health care costs and streamlined bureaucracy, but also need

- Better access to financing through larger risk sharing loan pool partnerships with the State (Urban Initiative Funds) non profits and banks.
- Increase capacity of non profits delivering ethnic unique technical assistance programs delivered at the neighborhood level and in rural areas
- Flexible programs that could accommodate unique needs such as financing tools such as RIBA-free financing.
- A streamlined and centralized and single state certification program for minority firms that will be acceptable by governments at the federal, state and local level.
- Implementation of state statutes that call for at least 25 percent of state procurement dollars going to small businesses
- State deposits in banks to be leveraged to require them to invest in low income neighborhoods
- Financial literacy programs especially on the use of credit

Minorities need affordable and accessible health care, but also need

- Culturally competent care from medical professionals who can treat specific diseases that occur at a higher incidence for minorities because of genetic or environmental factors.
- Government programs and officials to possess similar cultural competency so that public dollars can be more efficiently utilized in program implementation.
- Culturally specific education to minority groups about unique health care needs

Minorities need affordable housing, but also need

- Policies and professionals to understand the unique needs of minority communities such as multifamily units.
- Protection from predatory and discriminatory housing and financial practices
- Affordable housing to be located near their work sites because of transportation barriers

Minority Seniors need affordable health care, but also need

- Culturally competent care in nursing homes
- Allow families to be reimbursed for culturally competent care provided to Seniors in their homes
- Programs that focus on mental health needs of Seniors especially issues such as isolation and depression.

Minorities support immigration reform provided it is:

- A comprehensive approach that also looks at the assets and contribution of immigrants, the needs of the economy and the need for immigrant friendly policies at the federal, state and local level rather than a pure punitive or cost based approach. An example would be The Secure America & Orderly Immigration Act S.1033/HR 2330.

Minorities need appropriate transportation networks, but need

- Affordable and available public transportation especially in the Twin Cities metro area between their homes and jobs
- Alternative forms of public transportation such as light rail, provided these systems meet their transportation needs benefits the communities that are part of the construction routes (such as the minority communities in the University Avenue area of Saint Paul).

Welfare Reform

- Take a long term approach of encouraging welfare recipients move to permanent self sufficiency
- Pay attention to cracks in the program as a person moves between welfare programs
- Pay special attention to the needs of battered women
- Address the critical needs of affordable and culturally competent childcare and transportation for low income people.

Judicial System

- Policies for eliminating racial disparities in the criminal justice system, but at a minimum, ways to mitigate their effects, e.g. policies that do not further punish exonerated persons, or persons who have served time and have lived offense-free.
- Policies that address human trafficking and exploitation.
- Policies to rehabilitate ex offenders who served their time to help them integrate back into society
- Improve access to justice for all persons
- Provide adequate funding for police, prosecutors, courts, and public defenders
- Transparent detention procedures so that lawyers may know the place of confinement and have access to their clients
- Provide funding for court advocates in programs serving victims of prostitution and domestic violence
- Protect the independence of the judiciary
- Policies to breaking the intergenerational cycle of violence

Appointments

- In the Governor's Cabinet, important and crucial appointments for minorities must include areas of commerce, trade, transportation, and human and civil rights departments.

- The executive and administrative staff at all levels of county, state, and federal levels must begin to reflect the diversity of the state, such as appointments as Assistant and Deputy Commissioners, Office Directors etc. Appointments must be made in a timely, inclusive, and transparent manner.
- Greater utilization of minority constituents need to be a part of the recommendation, selection and appointment process, such the Governor's transition team, Board and Chair of the Metropolitan Council, Committee on Judicial Selection, Committees to appoint people on public boards and commissions. Today, at a time of bipartisan support for creating a multi-ethnic democracy in Iraq and across the globe, we need bipartisan support for multi-ethnic democracy and representation at home.

Judicial Appointments:

- Increase the number of minority judges on the Minnesota bench to reflect the increasing racial and ethnic diversity of the state, including judges of Asian Pacific American descent.
- Increase the number of minority lawyers from all ethnic and racial groups to serve on the Judicial Selection Commission to bring their perspective on the selection of minority judges.

The Summit was a response to the near invisibility of minorities in the policy platform on the official websites of candidates for public office. So after we identified the priorities in the summit we went back to the web sites to evaluate their content for inclusion of minority policy priorities.

Why analyze website? There is no public space that is easily identifiable by the common person that has the candidate's position on a number of issues. The only place where we could get it straight from the candidate is their website which in our modern internet age is their public face to the world. When newspapers and other media do bring out summaries it is usually towards the end of the election season. Why can't we have it at the beginning so that we can actively engage the candidate?

So we acknowledge the weakness of our methodology and in the same breath challenge people and institutions to fix a terrible weakness of our modern democratic process – poor quality data or data in multiple and often poorly visible sources. The end result is that a voter goes to the poll with imperfect information. We know we make better decision with better information that is available to us.

So taking the priorities identified by the Summit we evaluated the content of the websites of candidates for statewide office and below are some of our findings:

We highlight some of our observations below

Governor's Race

What we find in the websites of candidate's for Governor are for the most part generic policies without any references to the need for flexibility and cultural competency in

program implementation or delivery or in the operation of public institutions. Ken Pentel's campaign site acknowledges some of minority priorities in his Education, Health Care and Transportation policy. Pentel's site had a strong statement on inclusiveness in public appointments – an important priority at the Summit. The website of the Hatch campaign mentions the need to address the achievement gap in communities of color. Pawlenty's website states his record in various areas with no specific mention of his record in terms of minority community priorities. Davis' website position on the immigration issue is not aligned with Summit priorities.

In a tribute to the democratic process and a sign of respect to the voice of minority communities, two candidates for Governor Mike Hatch and Peter Hutchinson provided thoughtful responses to the priorities of the Summit in a number of areas and invited us to continue this dialogue with them. We have begun that process of dialogue and so will not comment on specifics at this time. What we can say is that their responses are aligned with Summit priorities in a number of areas. They have also committed to continue this dialogue beyond the elections. We invited them to post their responses on their websites for a larger dialogue with the community.

All candidates need to focus on minority business development given the vibrant growth of minority entrepreneurship in the state. Given the rapid growth of minority entrepreneurship in Minnesota as documented in the latest Economic Census attention to this sector is key to Minnesota's economic vitality. We provide specific suggestions how to nurture this vibrant entrepreneurship.

We call on all candidates to have a long term perspectives on all these policies from welfare reform to business development. We also would like to see a strong statement on inclusiveness in public appointments.

Senate Race

- Except for the issue of Immigration the candidates for Senate do not speak to the priorities raised in the Summit. Fitzgerald's and Kennedy's position on immigration are not aligned with those of the Summit. Klobuchar's position on immigration is more aligned with the Summit's priorities.

Congressional Races

- Most of the positive integration of minority policies can be found in the Candidate platforms in the 5th Congressional District.
- Keith Ellison's (Congressional District 5) policies in the areas of Education, Justice System, Transportation and Immigration are aligned with Summit priorities. Ellison site also celebrates the role of immigrant businesses in the Minnesotan economy.
- Fine (Congressional 5th District) has a positive statement on racial equity. His position on encouraging public transit is aligned with Summit priorities.
- Pond (Congressional 5th District) has a positive statement on environmental justice in relation to environmental pollution near low income and minority neighborhoods.

- Lee (Congressional 5th District) has a short statement of equal rights.
- Ellison, Fine, Lee and Pond (Congressional 5th District) all had immigration policies that were aligned with priorities identified in the Summit.
- Tim Walz (Congressional 1st District) had immigration policies that were mostly aligned with priorities identified in the Summit.
- Colleen Rowley (Congressional 2nd District) had immigration policies that were aligned with priorities identified in the Summit.
- Colleen Rowley (Congressional 2nd District) has a clear statement against all kinds of discrimination and in support of civil rights of every citizen.
- Wetterling's policy position on Immigration was partially aligned with the priorities identified in the Summit. She perhaps was the only candidate who recognized the important role of the SBA for small business – we encourage her think about the SBA's needed role in minority business development.
- All other candidates had no mention of minority policy priorities

Attorney General

- Lori Swanson was the only candidate whose website explicitly stated that she would defend civil rights in Minnesota.

Secretary of State

- Mark Ritchie attended the Summit. His site stated that he would work to provide equal opportunity to all to participate in the political process and encourage new citizens to vote through translation of election materials in different languages of new immigrants and other such programs.
- Joel Spoonheim attended the Summit. His response was part of the response of Hutchinson response discussed earlier.

State Auditor

- The auditor's role is to ask the right questions at the right time about the right issue – proper use of tax payer's dollars. Rebecca Otto attended the Summit and we are in dialogue with her about this important oversight role as they relate to minority priorities.

In conclusion – We offer a new paradigm for Minnesota to look at these priorities as important investments in Minnesota's future. This briefing is about the democratic process and we are honored that at least a few candidates have begun this dialogue with the community.

2006 Minority Political Summit

Presenters: Roger Banks, Lester Collins, Bruce Corrie, Ezell Jones, LeMoine LaPointe, Ramon Leon, Norma Renville