Dear Friends,

Now that the 2017 legislative session has wrapped up, I am writing to share my perspectives on the results of the legislative session.

It was a particularly challenging year and much of my work was devoted to fighting against attempts to roll back environmental laws and working to remove harmful policies buried in the state budget bills. I was frustrated by both the outcome and the flawed legislative process that lacked transparency and accountability.

As I look ahead, I want to reform the legislative process and see Minnesota focus on bold proposals that will improve our health, environment and communities. We need to tackle our problems, not tinker with them.

Please join me at a town hall meeting that I am hosting with Rep. Alice Hausman and Rep. John Lesch to discuss legislative actions:

Wednesday, July 5th, 6:30-8:30pm
Location: State Office Building, Room 10
100 Rev Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard, St. Paul MN

Please enter through the North entrance (door facing University Ave and Light Rail). Click here for a map showing nearby parking locations, with the State Office Building highlighted in bright blue.

We hope you can join us!

Sincerely,

John Marty

A Flawed Legislative Process

I was disheartened to see the lack of transparency and accountability on display during this legislative session. Most of the policy adopted by the 2017 legislature was contained in less than a dozen pieces of legislation. Most budget and policy decisions were made by a handful of legislators, often hidden from other legislators who are excluded from the process. These bills which contained different portions of the state budget also had hundreds of different, often controversial, policies included in them. Legislators often insert their legislative proposals into budget bills so that they are able to get bills passed that do not otherwise have the support needed to pass. It allows harmful provisions to be slipped into bills that contain the funding necessary to operate state government, without a chance for legislators to vote for or against those provisions. This effectively holds some provisions hostage, with legislators being forced to accept policies they consider harmful in order to pass a budget. Not only does this reduce accountability, but it also violates the Minnesota Constitution which states, “No law shall embrace more than one subject...”

In addition, the public has no ability to know about proposed policies until after they are enacted, or to know the positions of their elected representatives on those provisions. These “garbage bills” often contain unrelated provisions—there was a provision establishing a
licensure process for “eyelash technicians,” inserted in a bill funding state agencies. Whether that provision is desirable or not, it should be voted on separately so it can stand or fall on its own merits.

To add to the problems caused by these violations of the constitution’s single subject requirement, the legislative process has seldom given legislators time to read and understand these large compilations of budget and policy, and this year’s process was one of the worst. Many conference committee reports containing hundreds of pages were available to Senators and the public only a few hours before the bills were presented on the Senate floor. Much of the legislative action was taken in the middle of the night. All of this fails to meet even a minimal level of public transparency and accountability.

Over the years, I have spoken out against these harmful practices, and as these abuses of the legislative process have become worse, I have become more vocal. This year, I offered amendments to strip policy provisions out of each of the budget bills, and when those efforts failed, I filed a rare “protest and dissent” that the constitution offers legislators as a last resort.

At this time, I am exploring a lawsuit to force the legislature to stop violating the Constitution. I don’t take this step lightly, but if the legislature is unwilling to uphold the constitution, the courts need to step in.

Environment and Energy

As the ranking minority member of the Senate Energy Committee, I fought against a number of bills that would roll back Minnesota’s sustainable energy policies or weaken environmental protection. Unfortunately, one of the budget bills contained many of these damaging policies. Among these provisions were:

- Repeal of a 2013 law that created a long-term planning process to transition the state to a renewable energy future
- A measure exempting certain utilities from Public Utilities Commission oversight, which ensured that customers were treated fairly
- A measure exempting small energy utilities from participating in energy saving and efficiency requirements
- Creating a legislative takeover of the Renewable Development Fund, which had been an effective tool for encouraging wind and solar power development around the state. Legislators plan to use the money for purposes different from those for which the fund was created.

These provisions will set back Minnesota’s efforts to address climate change, and will hurt Minnesota’s economy and the many Minnesota businesses that are in the renewable energy field. I continue to advocate for Minnesota leadership in clean energy and believe we should be moving forward, not backwards in these initiatives.

Health Care

On both the federal and state level, this year’s proposals to “fix” health care are going to make the problem worse, not better. Republican legislators passed a proposal that would allow HMOs to become “for-profit” businesses. Unfortunately, under the new law, these companies could take public assets and convert them into private assets for wealthy executives. This will not improve our health care system. The legislature also put more than $800 million into efforts to stabilize the health insurance
market—an extremely costly attempt to temporarily address problems for the five percent of Minnesotans who buy in the individual market, yet the legislation fails to guarantee that insurers will offer affordable coverage in all parts of the state.

These misguided “reforms” like the proposed AHCA in Washington make it clear that we need a new approach to financing health care. Temporary fixes and increased help for insurance companies will not solve problems or improve care in the long term. This session, my bill to create the Minnesota Health Plan was co-authored by two-thirds of DFL legislators who recognized it as the positive and affordable solution to our health care crisis. The Minnesota Health Plan would replace our health insurance system with health care for all. It would cover all Minnesotans for all of their medical needs including dental, long term care, mental health and prescription drugs. This bill would establish a much-needed doctor and patient-centered system. Medical decisions should be made by patients and their doctors, not insurance companies, government, or employers.

**Taxes and Financial Stability**

I am concerned that the state’s financial stability has been significantly weakened by irresponsible budget practices this year. Particularly in the Transportation and Human Services budgets, the legislature shifted costs and delayed payments to future years—effectively “spend now and pay later.”

In addition to these financial gimmicks and spending large sums of money to subsidize health insurance, the legislature passed huge, unsustainable tax cuts for the benefit of wealthy taxpayers and big businesses. I am deeply concerned that this tax bill and the overall reliance on cost shifts and payment delays will create budget deficits in future years. We began the year with a $1.6 billion surplus, but with these irresponsible budget priorities we are hurting the state’s future simply for the sake of giving tax cuts to some of the wealthiest people in our state.

**Transportation**

Minnesota has many unmet transportation needs. Unfortunately, this session’s transportation funding bill provides far less than transportation experts tell us is necessary to maintain our current roads and bridges and make strategic improvements to infrastructure. Also, rather than raise new transportation funds, the budget shifts dollars from the state’s general fund, taking money from other important needs.

As a strong supporter of affordable public transit, I recognize its importance to hundreds of thousands of Minnesotans, and the benefits to everyone from less traffic congestion and cleaner air. I was dismayed by the grossly inadequate transit funding that Republicans included in the bill. This could lead to a downward spiral in our transit system. We need to invest in reliable and accessible public transit options that serve all Minnesotans, instead of forcing service cuts and increased fares.

To move Minnesota forward on transit, I authored Senate File 2316 to reduce transit fares all the way down to 25 cents per ride. This legislation would lead to significant increases in transit ridership (potentially doubling ridership within a couple years) which would lead to the need for more frequent service and more routes—effectively leading to an upward spiral in transit use and availability. All of this would result in significant economic savings to riders—especially important for many low-income workers and seniors. It would also be the least expensive way to address traffic congestion in the metro area, and would lead to a cleaner environment. Good transit systems are an asset to the health, economy and environment of our state, and I will continue to work for improved transit and oppose bills that do not provide adequate funding.
Due to strong advocacy from Governor Dayton, the education finance bill that passed during special session significantly increased funding for schools, providing an additional $483 million over the next two years, including a 2% increase to the per-pupil funding formula. However, this amount will hardly cover inflation, and some districts will still need to make budget cuts. Minnesota students deserve a high quality education, and while this bill is an improvement over earlier proposals, I am disappointed that we are not doing more to provide the funding and resources educators and kids need.

One of the problematic policies included in the education budget was a new four-tier license system that threatens teacher quality. The licensure system needed reform, but this new policy is not well designed.

I am pleased that the Perpich Center for Arts Education will remain open and that private school credits that would have diverted funding from public education were removed from the final bill.

**Economic Justice**

More than one in ten Minnesotans lives in poverty. Three in ten struggle to meet basic needs. Some workers cannot afford housing and go from their jobs to a homeless shelter at night. No one should face a situation where they are working hard yet still living in poverty and unable to pay for necessities.

This session, I introduced an economic justice proposal to move Minnesotans out of poverty by providing phased-in increases in the minimum wage and more than doubling the working family tax credit. High childcare costs continue to be a problem for many working families, so the bill would also increase affordable childcare and boost reimbursements so childcare providers get decent wages and parents can receive high quality childcare. In addition, welfare benefits have not had a single increase in over thirty years, so this legislation would finally increase the payments to assist families living in poverty. We urgently need this legislation and I’ll continue working for it next year.

**REAL ID and Drivers' Licenses**

I am pleased that the legislature passed a neutral REAL ID bill allowing Minnesotans to board domestic flights without a passport or additional documents. After months of game-playing, Republican legislators eventually pulled unrelated immigration policy language from the bill. With the passage of this bill, the state will begin issuing REAL IDs by October 2018.

Unfortunately, the controversial provision preventing undocumented immigrants from getting driver’s licenses that was removed from the REAL ID bill was later inserted in the final Judiciary and Public Safety bill. I opposed this provision, which will reduce public safety.
Immigrants who live in Minnesota communities are driving, and it is far safer to allow them to get licenses, which means they can get insurance and appropriate training.

Contact Information for Senator Marty

It is an honor to represent you in the Senate and I appreciate the many phone calls, email, mail and visits to my office. Please continue to keep in touch. My email is jmarty@senate.mn and my Legislative Assistant, Elspeth Cavert, can be reached at elspeth.cavert@senate.mn. Our office is in the MN Senate Building, room 2401. You can reach us at:

2401 Minnesota Senate Building
St Paul, MN 55155
651-296-5645

State Capitol Grand Reopening

After four years of restoration, the Minnesota State Capitol is now open to the public. Our beautiful Capitol has been returned to its former glory and is ready for the next 100 years.

To commemorate this special occasion and to invite Minnesotans back to the People’s House, there will be a Grand Opening Celebration held on August 11, 12, and 13. The celebration will include fireworks, concerts, demonstrations by the artisans that worked on the restoration, behind the scenes tours, and much more. With featured events to entertain Minnesotans of all ages from all corners of the state, the Grand Opening weekend will be educational, interactive and fun! Most of the events are free, or offered at a very low cost. Please mark your calendars to celebrate the People’s House this summer! For detailed information on the weekend, please visit www.mn.gov/mymncapitol.