



## We can do better in 2012 !

*A column by Mayor Dave Bartholomay printed in the Quad Community Press Newspaper on January 3, 2012*

By many measures 2011 was a lousy year for our state legislature. Partisan emotions road-blocked new solutions and compromise, and our legislators seemed incapable of working together to build a better state (notice the failed and embarrassing 'shutdown' this past summer). We need to do much better in 2012! So how do we get beyond the name calling and bitter divides to actually restore and improve, rather than continue to denigrate and destroy, this wonderful place we call Minnesota?

- Cut out the partisanship and name calling. Our legislators need to tone down the hot, divisive rhetoric and instead put their passion and energy towards working together on common sense solutions. Instead of blaming party leaders like former Republican Senate Majority Leader Amy Koch for her personal transgressions, or the Republican Party for financial mismanagement, or characterizing the Democratic Party with the old 'tax and spend' label, we need to move ahead by building positive relationships across party lines.
- Pledges can get in the way of finding a solution. Let's be honest: no reasonable person wants to raise taxes too high, or cut spending and throw granny out in the street, or spend a lot of public money on a Vikings stadium. But rather than pledging we will NEVER raise a tax or NEVER vote for this or that, we need to have an open discussion of the alternatives. Sure, we've got our preferences, but elected officials owe it to the entire electorate, not just those who voted for them, to look openly and honestly at all cut and revenue possibilities. 'Just say no' isn't much of an answer in the real world.
- We need a fair tax system. Legislative actions have caused our property taxes to become too big a piece of the mix, and our sales taxes don't cover a growing portion of what is sold in the state. We need our total tax amount to be shared fairly. Right now the middle class is seeing property tax increases, tuition increases for their kids, and new fees all while some folks in St. Paul keep claiming they aren't raising taxes. But the rest of us feel the effects in the real world, and the bottom line is tax policy starts with the Legislature and they need to focus on fairness.
- We need to get our spending under control. Legislators in St. Paul have to quit shifting money from our schools, quit mortgaging our economic future by a quick one-time sale of tobacco bonds, and stop using accounting gimmicks every session just to pretend the books are 'balanced'. We know better! Instead, have the courage to either make real cuts or increase taxes, or carefully choose a path that blends the two in order to have honest bookkeeping.
- Focus on what is important to the economy and the long-term health of our state, and not to interest groups and their divisive issues such as banning gay marriage, a Vikings stadium, or voter identification. Let's focus on getting our tax system competitive, on helping the private sector create jobs, on making our education system strong again, and on using innovation and collaboration to provide high-quality services through a leaner, more efficient, public sector.

In 2012, we need to focus on being smart and compassionate. We need to have civil and positive discussions about what we want from our schools, what level of public services we need and will pay for, and what it will take to get Minnesota back on the road again to a more prosperous, less divisive state.