

Section #1: About Yourself

Question #1: Please provide a short background about yourself.

Currently serving as the Representative for House District 10B. District 10B includes all of Aitkin County and a major portion of Crow Wing County.

House Committee Assignments: Vice Chair, Mining & Outdoor Recreation Committee; Member, Veterans Policy Committee; Agriculture Policy & Agriculture Finance Committee; Lands Sub-Committee; Legislative School Trust Commission; Rural Minnesota Caucus; Iron Range Resources & Rehabilitation Board (IRRRB).

Previous Community Service: County Commissioner Aitkin County; Commissioner Arrowhead Economic Opportunity Agency; Director Aitkin County Housing and Rehabilitation Authority, Chairperson Aitkin County Planning Commission; President Aitkin-Carlton County Farm Bureau; Member Bethlehem Lutheran Church Council & Stewardship Committee.

Question #2: What do you hope to accomplish by running for office? What will your main priorities be at the Capitol if you are elected?

Represent all the citizens of District 10B; strengthen our local economy, build on a quality education system, maintain a quality standard of support and care for our disabled and elderly, and foster basic social values, including freedom of religion and strengthening of our families.

Representing all the citizens of the district includes recognizing, including and supporting all people with disabilities and their care givers, and ensuing that state government does its part in that effort.

Question #3: What experience or connections, if any, do you have to the disability community?

Several family and friends that currently do or have required various levels of advanced care due to permanent disabilities, wheelchair bound, blindness, hearing and speech loss, and general limitations on skills we take for granted, driving an auto, prepare one's food, regulate and take medications, and taking care of the normal household chores required for independent living.

Section #2: Our Workforce Crisis

Question #1: Our industry is facing a workforce crisis. There are simply not enough people to provide the direct care needed for people with disabilities to lead independent lives. Given that the overwhelming majority of funding for disability services comes from the government, and low wages are a driving force behind high rates of staff turnover, what ideas would you offer for helping to create a livable wage for our direct support professionals and caregivers?

The current rate structure for our care givers requires reform, including adjustments based on the cost of care and equalizing the rate structure across geographical boundaries. We should be investing equally on a per client basis across the state, which requires changing the rate structure to end the difference between how our rural area clients versus clients in more populated areas of the state are treated with respect to funding.

In the 2015 legislative session, I was proud to be part of the group that helped reform our rate structure for nursing home care and increasing our investment in that area. A similar reform needs to be extended to our in-home-care system and group homes for both the disabled and elderly.

Question #2: As technology continues to become a bigger part of everyone's lives, there are numerous products that can be used by individuals with disabilities which offer them increased independence, including things as simple as apps on cell phones and tablets. Some technology can supplement staff while others can substitute for staff. Would you support the use of public dollars to increase the availability and use of technology?

Yes, in particular rural broadband access remains a serious issue in our district. I have during the 89th legislative session and will continue to support expanding reliable, high quality and reasonably priced broadband access for our rural areas.

That will allow more clients remain at home by applying today's modern technology in rural areas. The technology already exists for major improvements in tele-medicine and client monitoring systems, what we lack in many parts of rural Minnesota is the high speed broadband infrastructure these systems require to operate effectively.

While not mentioned in the question, access to transportation is also a major issue in rural Minnesota for the disabled. Lack of transportation limits access to employment, education, and other important activities required for independent living. Access to reliable and affordable transportation is another area we must continue to focus on with respect to the disabled.

Section #3: The Sustainability of our System

Question #1: Minnesota's Olmstead Plan includes a broad series of key activities our state must accomplish to ensure people with disabilities are living, learning, working and enjoying life in the most integrated setting appropriate for their needs. In 2015, a set of very ambitious goals and benchmarks were finalized and approved by the Minnesota courts to help ensure that the intent of the Olmstead Plan is realized. What is your role as a legislator to oversee and ensure that those goals are met?

The precepts of the Olmstead Plan are we ensure people with disabilities can live, learn, work, and enjoy life in the most integrated manner their individual situation will allow. My role as a legislator is primarily two-fold with respect to implementation and compliance with the Olmstead Plan.

Funding: Every odd numbered year the legislature in collaboration with the governor develop and pass a two year state budget that funds state agencies, we must ensure that both the spirit and intent of the Olmstead Plan for Minnesota is properly funded in our state agency budgets.

Policy: On an annual basis the legislature in collaboration with the governor review and make adjustments to policy and regulations that govern implementation and compliance with the Olmstead Plan.

Question #2: Affordable housing is an issue for many people in Minnesota. A cornerstone of Minnesota's Olmstead Plan is the opportunity for individuals with disabilities to live as independently as they choose. As a legislator how would you strategically expand availability of affordable housing with accessibility features for Minnesotans with disabilities?

Encourage and support community based organizations through reasonable regulations with respect to housing. Also through appropriate financial incentives support the expansion of client focused housing and services. That housing has to take into consideration first and foremost the individual

client, including consideration and support of the availability and access to employment, education and other activities and facilities that are available to the rest of the public.

Question #3: Our industry has seen an influx of "unfunded mandates" - items that cost providers additional money without subsequent compensation, such as the increase in minimum wage, the Affordable Care Act, increased regulatory fees and the new Department of Labor Overtime Rule to name a few. When the government adds a new mandate what is its responsibility in supporting government funded businesses to pay for those mandates?

Both the federal and state government must show much greater restraint in adding unfunded mandates to our facilities and workers in the disabled and elder care areas. When they do, they must determine the cost impact and allow for rate increases paid by the state and federal government to ensure we can sustain a quality level of care for our disabled and elderly.

A recent example that exacerbated an employment issue within the disabled and elder care system is the state mandated raise in the minimum wage without understanding and anticipating the impact on the facilities and workers that care for our disabled and elders. That mandate has created an issue within the industry that needs to be resolved. The cost of employment was increased, but the fixed rate structure that provides the major portion of revenue for group homes remained unchanged.

Unlike other industry sectors that can raise their prices in response to increased labor costs, the resources available to pay workers and provide services for the vast majority of our disabled and elders are dictated by the reimbursement rate structure set by the state and federal government.

With the exception of the recent reform we at the Minnesota Legislature made in 2015 for nursing home facilities, the state reimbursement rate structure for in-home-care and group home services has remained unchanged for far too long. With a fixed and unchanged revenue stream, and the state mandated increase in the minimum wage, services and staffing levels are being squeezed. This makes it difficult to hire entry level employees that are considering a career in this area.

We need to extend the rate structure reform to all sectors of disabled and elder care services. That will put those workers and facilities on a more even playing field with their colleagues at the nursing home facilities.

During the 89th Minnesota Legislative Session we made progress in reforming how we support our nursing home care system, however that is only one segment of the overall disabled and elderly care system in Minnesota.

Going forward we need to focus on improving the revenue stream for in-home-care and group homes, which will allow an increase in the compensation for those dedicated critical workers.

I look forward to the next legislative session and the opportunity to continue to work on ensuring we provide the highest quality sustainable care for our disabled and elderly. We can do that by reforming the reimbursement rate structure so employers can appropriately compensate those that work in this important sector.

To all that work in this important area – thank you for what you do!