

Donna Bergstrom, Candidate
State Senate District 7

AARM

Section #1

1. I am a retired United States Marine Corps Reserve officer and currently serve as a Guardian ad Litem for the State of Minnesota. I am a wife and the mother of an 11-year-old boy who is on the autism spectrum. I am active in my community, volunteering at school functions and teaching Sunday School at my church. Having grown up in Carlton, Minnesota, and graduating from the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, with a degree in Political Science, I had long hoped to return to my home state following years in the military and in Washington, D.C. and continue to pursue my interest in public service.
2. Should I succeed in my campaign for the Minnesota Senate, my highest priorities will include improving care for the state's veterans, closing the education gap that adversely affects minority students, reforming the system that determines the welfare of indigent children and those shuttled through the foster care system, improving the City of Duluth's roads, and tackling the enormous problem of illicit drug trafficking in St. Louis County.
3. As a Guardian ad Litem, as the mother of a young child on the autism spectrum, and as the daughter of a parent with disabilities, my exposure to this particular community is vast. As a former employee of the Center for American Indian Resources, I regularly interacted with members of the disability community. While living in Silver Spring, MD I was hired as a consultant to the Executive Director of SEEC, a non-profit agency, "seeking equality, empowerment, and community for people with developmental disabilities" in creating a strategic plan to support their mission of empowering "people with intellectual and developmental disabilities to direct their lives with dignity, choice, authority, and responsibility."

Section #2

1. High rates of turnover among home caregivers is, of course, a serious problem, and the wages for such work frequently do not reflect the difficulty of and stresses associated with caring for the disabled and for the elderly. In fact, serving as the principal caregiver for a loved one is well-known to be among the most emotionally and physically exhausting tasks. I agree that wages for professional caregivers should be commensurate with the importance and difficulty of the responsibilities involved. I will not pretend to know the answers to the problem of staff turnover and low wages, but will make it a priority to address these questions. This is, in part, a problem of revenue, and it would be irresponsible for any candidate for office to cavalierly suggest shifting funds around from within federal and state budgets without thoroughly investigating the options and ramifications.
2. Yes, I would support the use of tax dollars to facilitate the introduction into the lives of the disabled of technologies designed to improve those lives. Advances in prostheses, for example, have improved the lives of numerous amputees, and advances in medical

research that can help restore sight to the blind or hearing to the deaf deserve to receive government assistance. Technological spin-offs from federal research programs, including programs designed to rehabilitate disabled veterans (one of my core priorities should I be elected) optimize funding for the benefit of the entire nation, not just those for whom these programs are initially intended.

Section #3

1. The Court's September 2015 approval of the state's Olmstead Plan provided the "green light" the state needed to move ahead with this meritorious proposal. As a legislator, it will be my responsibility, and my mission, to ensure that governmental agencies, such as the Departments of Health, Human Services, and Human Rights, involved in executing the Olmstead Plan are indeed carrying out their responsibilities. The June 21, 2016 decision by the Court to approve amendments to the original Plan provides further impetus to move forward on a program supported by United States Presidents of both major political parties.
2. It is within the domain of all levels of government to ensure appropriate housing for the disabled. Housing tailored to the special needs of the disabled community is feasible and should receive the resources needed to ensure that such housing is available to those in need.
3. This question--what is the government's responsibility when establishing "unfunded mandates"--is one with which I and many others have struggled for years. Governments, especially the federal government, regularly imposes such mandates upon the private sector, leaving the latter in the unenviable position of having to comply with laws that, however meritorious, impose sometimes considerable financial burden. It is incumbent upon government to minimize such instances, but politics will invariably preclude a resolution to this problem. As an elected official, I will make it my responsibility to ensure that mandates that entail financial costs to private entities include incentives, such as tax relief, intended to minimize or alleviate that burden.