



Friday, June 12, 2020

Dear Members of the Minnesota House and Senate,

Minnesota needs your leadership. The COVID-19 pandemic and ensuing government-imposed shutdowns have decimated our economy and put thousands out of work. Constitutional checks and balances have been thrown off-kilter by what is now the longest peacetime state of emergency in Minnesota history. Peaceful protests that sprang up in reaction to decades of unjust and racially biased discrimination turned violent and ugly.

During the Special Session that begins today, you as lawmakers have a chance to act quickly to ensure a fiscally responsible path forward that sets the foundation for a strong economy for Minnesotans, to restore regular order to our legislative process, and take steps to end a shameful racial double standard within our justice system.

The Legislature is reconvening with a \$2.4 billion deficit projected by the end of the current budget cycle, a \$4 billion drop from the surplus projected just months ago – a stark reminder of the economic hardship caused by both the pandemic and the government’s response to it. Though the “official” number won’t come until the next February budget forecast, policymakers cannot afford to wait until next year to begin to tackle these challenges. Minnesota government will have to do more with less, make tough budget decisions, and live within its means – just like every family and business has been forced to do.

In the closing days of the legislative session, and as the current special session began to emerge as an inevitability, we released a “Roadmap for Recovery”, which outlined steps that the Legislature can take RIGHT NOW to begin to put the state back on firmer economic footing. This document goes into more detail on how the state can safely get the economy going, ensure oversight of federal dollars, avoid spending money we don’t have, and re-evaluate and re-prioritize within the state’s existing budget.

But in order to effectively address this and other challenges, the Legislature needs to reassert its constitutional role as the voice of the people. Given the advanced technological and communications tools at our disposal and the adjustments to operating procedures already implemented by the legislature, there is no reason for the state of emergency (which gives the Governor broad unilateral powers) to continue. An end to this overreach of executive authority and a return to Constitutional governance doesn’t mean an end to effective COVID-19 response. It simply means that laws related to public health and safety will be acted on by the people’s representatives in the House and Senate and, in turn, implemented by the Governor and the administration. In fact, every order that the Governor has used to “flatten the curve” and help protect Minnesotans can be continued, with the additional respect conferred that follows bi-partisan debate and agreement.

Budgets and reopening and other COVID-19-related responses are only one part of Minnesotans’ expectation for this session. The brutal killing of George Floyd – only the most recent example of well-documented excessive use of force on our streets – further demonstrates that our state and country need to address the injustices that have been present in our government institutions for too long. These tragedies should be the catalyst for change that help bring our state closer to equality and justice for every citizen.

Through broad-based grassroots outreach, *Americans for Prosperity* (AFP) is driving long-term solutions to the country’s biggest problems. AFP activists engage friends and neighbors on key issues and encourage them to take an active role in building a culture of mutual benefit, where people succeed by helping one another. AFP recruits and unites activists in 35 states behind a common goal of advancing policies that will help people improve their lives.



Americans for Prosperity-Minnesota is committed to this cause through support for a wide range of public policy reforms, including three core areas of criminal justice reform. While these aren't new issues for our organization, they have a renewed importance and urgency:

- Transform **police culture** to prioritize transparency and accountability with the public by addressing racism, recruitment practices, training, tactics, and union contracts.
- Address **structural barriers** to good policing such as civil asset forfeiture, qualified immunity, and an overemphasis on ticketing or arrest numbers. Elevate alternative measures of success, including community engagement and public safety.
- Eliminate **unnecessary criminalization**. Law enforcement resources should be focused on preventing and solving serious crime, not generating unnecessary criminal records for individuals dealing with homelessness, mental illness, and substance abuse.

As the Legislature moves forward in response to these issues, we will be working with activists across the state to share their perspectives and lend support to your efforts to move the state forward. Please don't hesitate to reach out with any questions or to find ways to work together toward our shared values.

Sincerely,

Jason Flohrs  
State Director  
Americans for Prosperity - Minnesota