



# GROWTH & JUSTICE

CENTER FOR A PROSPEROUS, FAIR, AND SUSTAINABLE MINNESOTA ECONOMY

Volume 13

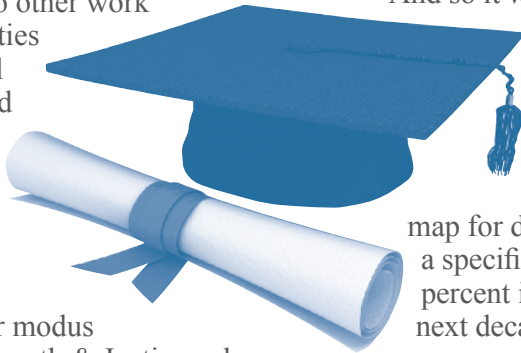
Fall 2010

## Getting it Done in 2011 and beyond, on higher-ed attainment for Minnesota

*Turbulent times portend possibilities and progress*

Some policy research organizations produce impressive reports and solid recommendations, and then they drift on to other work or other priorities as the political winds shift and new controversies and issues become more fashionable.

That is not our modus operandi at Growth & Justice, where from the beginning we made a strategic decision to be a “think-and-do” tank, and to follow through on our research and prescriptions for change with citizen engagement, persuasive



communications and persistent advocacy on a multi-partisan front.

And so it will be with our signature work so far, *Smart Investments<sup>SM</sup> in Minnesota’s Students (SIMS)*, -a durable and comprehensive roadmap for driving Minnesota to a specific destination: a 50 percent improvement over the next decade in the portion of our young people who obtain a higher-education credential. This means that by 2020, 75 percent of our young adults will have a post-secondary degree or certificate beyond a high-school diploma, compared to

a current completion rate of about 50 percent. Nothing matters more for job growth and economic justice.

And with a new governor and new legislative leadership taking office in January, and with all these leaders signaling interest in education reform and investment, we are in an ideal position to advance our evidence-tested interventions toward the goal. We have maintained good and respectful relationships with the new leaders of the House, Senate and executive branch of state government, and we are convinced we will make progress.

As we enter the 2011 legislative session, we are focused on achieving a few very specific objectives:

*continued on page 7*

## Driving down Minnesota’s greenhouse gas emissions

The miles we drive in Minnesota account for a big share of the state’s total greenhouse gas emissions, and we can reduce the miles logged through smart investments and policies that improve land use, spur transit-oriented development, expand transit service, and use pricing mechanisms that tie the costs of driving to miles driven.

A new Growth & Justice report on [\*Driving Down Minnesota’s Greenhouse Gas Emissions\*](#) builds from the latest research to highlight challenges and policy options for reducing the high level of vehicle miles traveled (VMT) on Minnesota’s roadways. With the transportation sector accounting for one-fourth of all greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in Minnesota, reductions in VMT are important.

One policy approach is to move toward land-use patterns of greater density and mixed-use, transit-oriented

*continued on page 6*

## Complexity, uncertainty cloud the issue of economic growth and state tax rates

*By Charlie Quimby and Marsha Blumenthal*

Growth & Justice senior policy fellows Marsha Blumenthal and Charlie Quimby teamed up to produce the following opinion piece based on Blumenthal’s G&J policy brief on [State Fiscal Policy and Economic Growth: Do Taxes Make a Difference?](#)

Complexity doesn’t play well in election campaigns. Simple answers to big problems are appealing, so we are told: “We must cut taxes or we will lose jobs and business growth” or, “Tax increases won’t make a bit of difference to the economy.” We think Minnesota voters are smart enough to handle the truth, that there’s ambiguity around how the state might balance its budget with the least negative impact on economic performance.

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## GROWTH & JUSTICE

Our mission is to make Minnesota's economy simultaneously more prosperous and fair. We are a non-partisan advocate for fair taxation and "smart" public investment — fiscally responsible, accountable investment that advances prosperity for all Minnesotans. We believe a sustainable economy provides the foundation for a just society.

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Newsletter layout: Mark Tundel

# From the President

By Dane Smith

**A**s hard times descended on the economy and the philanthropic sector in 2008, we heard advice from every quarter that collaboration and partnerships would be the wave of the future for savvy nonprofits.

We have long been well aware that scores of groups in Minnesota share our goal of broader economic prosperity, so we took this advice to heart. And we're thriving despite a tighter budget, in part because we are becoming more effective at our policy work through networking and building productive partnerships on many fronts.

Some examples:

**Minnesota Minority Education Partnership:** We have developed a strong working relationship with MMEP, meeting regularly with executive director Carlos Mariani and associate director Jennifer Godinez to strategize and share information and research. MMEP's considerable expertise on the real obstacles to higher education attainment in communities of color has helped sharpen our focus on this element of our education work.

**Invest in Minnesota Campaign:** Growth & Justice has been part of this "revenue coalition" for more than three years and we're expecting it will be a strong and visible presence in 2011, calling for a balanced solution to the state's budget crisis as well as a fairer tax structure. We are a steering committee member of this truly broad coalition, which includes the Minnesota Council of Nonprofits, the Joint Religious Legislative Coalition (representing mainline Protestant, Catholic, Jewish and Islamic faith communities) and the AFL-CIO (representing more than 300,000 working Minnesotans).


**Center for Rural Policy and Development:** Though we're based in Saint Paul, Growth & Justice has a statewide mission and reach. Earlier this year we were invited by this St. Peter-based organization to submit an [essay](#) offering advice for Minnesota's next governor. We drew from the essay to produce a series of commen-

taries in October, tailored for Greater Minnesota's northern, central and southern regions, urging readers to support policies that favor smart public investments for the vulnerable and valuable communities in rural areas of our state.

**Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota Foundation and Wilder Research:** These two respected organizations recently produced an important [study](#) documenting major health inequities in the Twin Cities region. We were one of several organizations invited to write a response to the findings, adding our thoughts and recommendations on ways to address those inequities.

**Parents United for Public Schools, Ready 4 K and the Minnesota Rural Education Association:** These groups have been among our greatest allies in pressing for smarter education investments. In June they were co-sponsors for our June gubernatorial candidate forum, and were facilitators or participants in our August education roundtable conversations.

In collaborative efforts on the good government front, we've been participating in a monthly discussion group with a cadre of policy experts on ways to redesign our large governmental systems and make them more efficient and effective. The bipartisan Redesign Caucus in the Legislature has sought our advice and input, and we are currently serving on an advisory committee for the Citizens League/Bush Foundation "Common Cents" initiative, designed to engage Minnesotans in a meaningful discussion of the values and priorities that should frame state budget decisions.

A sign on former Gov. Rudy Perpich's office wall said: "None of us is as smart as all of us." We couldn't agree more. In that spirit, we expect to forge new partnerships in the coming months and years, developing a practical, progressive coalition that is greater and stronger than the sum of its parts. 

# Growth & Justice adds two new fellows to our team

**G**rowth & Justice is fortunate to have a group of respected and talented individuals who participate in our policy fellows group. They provide advice, research, analysis and commentary for media outlets and the Growth & Justice blog and also speak to groups on behalf of Growth & Justice. In 2010, we added two more distinguished fellows:

**Don Ostrom** taught in the political science department at Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter from 1972 – 2004. After retiring from Gustavus, Don was a visiting professor in the Department of Political Science at Saint Olaf College in Northfield. Don's area of expertise is U.S. government and politics.

While working at Gustavus and living in St. Peter, Don served as a member of the St. Peter School

Board, and was elected to four terms in the Minnesota House of Representatives, serving from 1989 through 1996. During his time in the Legislature, Don was a member of committees dealing with taxes, health and human services, and transportation issues. During Don's last session he was an assistant majority leader.

Don earned his B.A. from St. Olaf and his M.A. and Ph.D. from Washington University in St. Louis, MO. Don and his wife, Florence, have lived in Minneapolis since retirement and have three grown children.

**Tom Legg** is a senior lecturer at the University of Minnesota's Carlson. He has also held teaching positions in finance and economics at the University of St. Thomas, St. Cloud State University, and Metropolitan State University over the last 20 years.

His current research interests are in business valuation and the use of accounting-based return measures in that process, and the design of state and local economic development policy instruments.

Through his firm TD Legg Financial Economics, Tom provides financial and economic analysis primarily involving applications of valuation techniques. These services include valuation, design of investment decision systems, expert testimony, and custom seminars in valuation and financial management.

Tom earned a bachelor's degree in accounting from the University of Minnesota, Duluth, and holds a Ph.D. in applied economics from the University of Minnesota. ☞

## The great Minnesota give together!

**W**hile gifts to Growth & Justice always help us to advance our progressive agenda for Minnesota, gifts given on Nov. 16 could help even more. Give to the Max Day returns this year with opportunities for nonprofits to maximize donations through bonus grants supplied by partner foundations.

Every hour during Give to the Max Day, a random donor's charity will be selected for a \$1,000 bonus. You could be the donor that earns Growth & Justice an extra \$1,000!

Organizations with a leading number of individual donors will be put on the leader board for a chance to win \$10,000 or even \$20,000 for having the greatest number of donors

This makes gifts of every size more important than ever. Help us get "on the board" by telling your friends and neighbors to give as little as \$10!

GiveMN.org links Minnesotans with charities they care about. Last year more than 38,000 donors logged on to GiveMN.org and gave over \$14 million to more than 3,000 Minnesota charities and nonprofits in 24 hours on Give to the Max Day. The online giving platform allows you to easily support organizations that match your giving goals with secure credit or debit card donations, receive automated tax deductible receipts through email, and conveniently track and record your donations in a single online location.



Give to the Max Day is midnight-to-midnight Nov. 16. Set reminders now for you and your friends to donate at <http://givemn.razoo.com/story/Growth-And-Justice>. ☞

**TO DONATE ON NOV. 16 VISIT OUR GIVEMN PAGE AT:**

**<http://givemn.razoo.com/story/Growth-And-Justice>**

# Facts & Fixes at your fingertips

This fall Growth & Justice launched a new feature of our website, providing information-seekers easy access to the substantial research and analysis we've produced on how to spur growth and build a more inclusive prosperity in Minnesota. In our new Facts & Fixes section, we highlight the importance of improving education, transportation, economic development, tax reform, and government accountability. The site includes links to research findings and spells out specific public policy recommendations.



We believe we provide sound analysis and prescriptions for public policy in Minnesota and sensible strategies for both economic growth and economic justice. And often times, this work can be quite dense, and difficult to sort into easily accessible parts. This new feature condenses complicated public policy research findings and recommendations for quick reference, drawing on almost a decade of Growth & Justice work.

“Citizens, candidates, business leaders and government officials value good research, but they need faster

access to understandable, digestible information,” said Growth & Justice president Dane Smith.

The Facts & Fixes website gives Minnesotans quick, valuable information on a range of important issues, but it also links users to in-depth Growth & Justice reports and policy briefs that offer far more detailed information on the research and the recommendations.

Facts & Fixes was developed and compiled by Heidi Hope, who managed this initiative while serving as a research assistant to Growth & Justice. View this new resource at [http://www.growthandjustice.org/facts\\_fixes.html](http://www.growthandjustice.org/facts_fixes.html).

## Some recommendations from Facts & Fixes include:

### Education

#### Investments in:

- Good prenatal care and quality early childhood experiences to ready a child for elementary school learning.
- Rigorous coursework and tutoring, and social supports.
- College prep curriculum with teacher development, parent involvement, student counseling and progress monitoring.

### Government Accountability

- Establish leadership commitment.
- Set long term goals and priorities.
- Strive for transparency, straight talk and open books.
- Maintain fiscal responsibility and fairness.
- Focus on efficiency and effectiveness.
- Demand accountability for results.


### Economic Development

- Invest in education and training.
- Invest in public infrastructure that will yield high-return benefits for the cost.
- Avoid or minimize company-specific tax breaks and public subsidies.
- Pursue economic development strategies that take aim at the drivers of economic growth.
- Avoid using tax dollars as financial capital for private ventures.

### Transportation

- Rigorously pursue transit service and improvements aimed at transporting Minnesotans with low income and limited options.
- Assess conditions and reconfigure the interregional corridor system to better reflect freight patterns in Minnesota and strengthen connections between the state's trade centers.

### Taxes

- The measures of success of any new revenue plan should be:
  1. Increasing the proportionality of our tax system at the top, as measured by the state's tax incidence analysis.
  2. Avoiding new taxes on families with below-average earnings.
  3. Reducing the ratio of fees to taxes, since fees are more regressive.
- Because business taxes fall disproportionately on Minnesotans with lower incomes, the state should consider a restructured tax system that reduces and simplifies business taxes. 

Economists agree, in theory, that taxes can reduce economic growth. Any tax that affects behavior (which is just about every tax) imposes economic inefficiencies. Productive resources get redirected as individuals and businesses take steps to avoid the tax. But it's very difficult to test the theory by measuring tax-driven consequences in the real world. That's partly because diverse state economies and policies defy direct comparison. Also, taxes, spending and the economy don't move independently in states -- but neither do they move in lockstep.

For example, when a state's economy starts to contract, tax revenues drop. And because a state must balance its budget, one result may be tax increases. This relationship might look like "higher taxes slow economic growth" But another way to put it is "slow economic growth leads to higher taxes." In other words, while evidence may show an association between high taxes and slow growth, it doesn't tell us which caused the other.

The body of research we reviewed for our recent study of state fiscal policy and economic growth generally supports the long-held consensus of economists that states should set taxes by making the tax base as broad as possible so as to keep the marginal rates as low as possible. The evidence suggests that, all other things equal, states with above-average taxes (measured as tax revenues as a percentage of personal income) do not do as well in personal income or employment or growth relative to states with average or below-average ratios. In other words, when it comes to taxes, Minnesota may not want to be "well above average."

However, all other things are not always equal, so there are some important caveats about drawing conclusions from studies that compare states to gauge the impact of taxes on growth.

**Political rhetoric inflates state disparities.** Differences in economic activity among states that appear associated with taxes are likely to be small. In Timothy Bartik's distillation of 48 studies, economic activity declines, on average, 3 percent with an increase in taxes of 10 percent. Michael Wasylenko's review finds smaller estimates, clustering between zero and 2.6 percent.


**The findings leave room for interpretation.** For example, in 24 of the 34 business studies Wasylenko surveys, economic activity is negatively associated with business taxes, while the results of personal tax studies are more balanced — some finding a negative association with employment growth and others finding no significant relationship. Could the impacts of business and personal taxes differ?

**How states balance taxes and spending matters.** There is some evidence that the apparent negative impact of higher taxes will be mitigated if expenditures rise for "productive" investments. A 1985 study of 48 states by L. Jay Helms reports negative impacts on state personal income associated with taxes. But it also reports positive impacts — larger than the negative tax impacts — associated with spending on education, health and highways. This suggests that only states raising taxes and spending the increase on less productive investments are likely to experience declines in average personal income. A study of manufactur-

ing employment by Mofidi Alaeddin and Joe A. Stone found significantly positive impacts on employment growth for spending on education, health and highways, holding taxes constant. However, increased spending, when funded by an increase in taxes had little to no impact on manufacturing employment.

**Tax cuts are over-rated.** Attempts to exploit a tax/growth tradeoff by enacting large, sustained tax cuts do not appear to produce the hoped-for results.

The studies we've cited above use statistical methods that may not measure tax-driven consequences accurately and therefore must be taken with a grain of salt. It's rare to be able to measure separately changes in fiscal policy and changes in economic activity. One study that did so examined New Jersey Gov. Christine Todd Whitman's reduction of personal income taxes by a cumulative 30 percent. Researchers W. Robert Reed and Cynthia L. Rogers found that about 75 percent of the mid-1990s economic growth experienced in New Jersey counties in the wake of the cuts was shared by surrounding states and that the tax cuts had no significant, specific impact on New Jersey employment growth. They conclude that the Whitman policy experiment does not support the case for tax cuts stimulating growth.

These findings suggest debates about taxes should cool both the "job-killer" and the "magic wand" rhetoric, focusing instead on the merits of specific public investments in human capital and physical infrastructure. 

development so that we make fewer and shorter trips by car. Also, increased use of transit in Minnesota's cities will lead to modest decreases in vehicle miles traveled because transit vehicles in urban areas produce fewer GHG emissions per passenger mile than cars.

And pricing strategies that increase the costs of driving – for example, congestion pricing on crowded freeways, and tax and registration fees based on travel levels – can reduce driving. But pricing measures also may hit some low-income and rural Minnesotans disproportionately hard.

The Growth & Justice report lays out four key findings for policymakers hoping to address VMT challenges:

- **We drive a lot.** Minnesota drivers travel more miles than average compared to the nation as a whole and even to our neighboring states of Iowa and Wisconsin. On a per capita basis, Minnesota's total for vehicle miles is about on par with sparsely populated South Dakota, even though Minnesota's population density is 6.5 times greater.

- **Land-use and transit strategies should be pursued together.** While Minnesota can modestly reduce its greenhouse gas emissions through increased transit service alone or through changes in land use patterns, bigger impacts come from investments, policies and choices that link transit and land-use and encourage transit-oriented development.
- **Potential environmental gains from land use changes and transit will depend on increased density.** Because these changes take time and investment, it's smart to start now and focus on areas with existing concentrations of employment and housing – areas that already boast significant development.
- **Increased density may carry a price.** Concentrations of employment may make congestion worse on some streets and thoroughfares connecting to those areas. Roadway pricing initiatives, such as the MnPASS lanes on I-394 and I-35W, can mitigate this traffic congestion, as can transit.

State and local governments can have a positive impact on transportation-related GHG emissions through

policies that reduce the number of vehicle miles traveled (VMT) on Minnesota's roadways. Two other approaches — better fuel efficiency and cleaner fuels — also are important but more strongly influenced by federal policy, and the potential gains from these two strategies will be undermined unless we reverse our historical pattern of more and more roadway travel.

*Driving Down Minnesota's Greenhouse Gas Emissions* presents key, evidence-based points and potential policies for three focus areas – land use and transit-oriented development, transit, and pricing strategies.

Support for this new report came from the McKnight Foundation's Regions & Communities Program and RE-AMP. Growth & Justice and the steering committee for its initiative on *Smart Investments<sup>SM</sup> in Transportation for Minnesota* will draw upon the research findings and policy options presented in this report as they move toward overarching recommendations to be presented in a final investment proposal for transportation policy in Minnesota. 📄

## Growth & Justice is Going Paper Free!

If you received the paper version of this newsletter we may not have your e-mail address on file. If you do not receive e-mails from us **please send your current e-mail address to [info@growthandjustice.org](mailto:info@growthandjustice.org)** so that we can share the electronic version of future newsletters with you. Sending the newsletter electronically reduces our printing and postage expenses, decreases our organization's environmental footprint, and brings our news to you faster. We do not share our e-mail lists with other groups, and do our best not to fill up your inbox.

securing an official recognition and establishment of the higher-education attainment goal in law or policy language, establishing a research clearinghouse that evaluates the best practices to support higher-ed completion and education system improvement, and making steps toward the smart investments in early childhood education and other key areas spelled out in the SIMS framework.

Another huge budget shortfall, amounting to more than 15 percent of our state government's general fund, obviously trims our sails and precludes dramatic progress toward the attainment goal early in this decade. It's unlikely we can convince the governor or the Legislature in the next year or two to come up with the hundreds of millions of dollars it will take to properly fund early childhood education, mentoring programs, tuition relief and the other evidence-tested interventions recommended in our project.

At the Legislature and with the new administration, we will also continue to be a voice for tax sufficiency and fairness, and the need to be mindful of maintaining smart public investments for health, physical infrastructure and other basic structures that protect the common good. We're not a special interest group that works against the wider public interest by advocating for only one type of funding need. We make the case for a broader approach, for a broader prosperity.


Despite these obvious obstacles, we've had a very encouraging show of support for our perseverance and commitment toward the higher-ed attainment goal, toward which we are working on many fronts. To wit:

- In August, more than 80 legislators and candidates (representing four different political parties), influential community leaders and education policy experts par-

ticipated in our "Getting it Done" roundtable discussions. The larger group separated into five breakout sessions that provided very useful feedback on the challenges and opportunities that face us in this mission.

- We held a gubernatorial candidate forum on education issues last summer before the primary, co-sponsored by allied groups: Ready 4 K, Parents United for Public Schools, Minnesota Minority Education Partnership, and the Minnesota Rural Education Association. Interest in this forum was high, with nearly 200 attendees packing the room.
- Earlier this year we produced a series of five education policy briefs, building off the original *Smart Investments<sup>SM</sup> in Minnesota's Students* report and distilling the information into more accessible and useful short-form reference materials. Each brief presents new research and policy recommendations for the best interventions at each step on the education continuum, from birth to higher education.
- Because of our drumbeat on this issue, gubernatorial candidates during the election campaign debates referenced our work several times. For example, during an October candidate forum on early childhood issues at Macalester College, both candidate Tom Horner and Ready 4 K executive director Todd Otis cited our Oct. 4 Star Tribune commentary which called on candidates to set the higher-ed goal and begin investing in high-quality education for parents and young children.
- This fall we began conversations about our education policy goals with key committee leaders in the House and Senate, and we're looking forward to being a valuable resource for the Legislature in 2011.

- We've maintained a busy schedule of presentations on our SIMS work to civic and business groups, church groups, and education groups and will continue this important outreach in the coming year.

This higher-education achievement goal is more than aspirational. It's achievable. And it's encouraging to see that we are among a growing list of groups working toward this target. Similar long-term objectives have been established by the Bush Foundation, the Lumina Foundation in Indiana and President Obama's American Graduation Initiative. Momentum is growing for this critical mission. Growth & Justice is keenly focused on it, and we will get there with your help. 

## How can you get involved?

### Host a house party!

Growth & Justice loves spreading the word and meeting folks all over Minnesota. If enough people hear our common sense approach and solutions they will understand how our work is crucial to making real change happen.

Please contact Mark Tundel at 651-917-6037 or email [mark@growthandjustice.org](mailto:mark@growthandjustice.org) to schedule a house party.

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# GROWTH & JUSTICE

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## Meet the Growth & Justice Interns

**Amelia Cruver** has been working for Growth & Justice as an education policy intern since September. Amelia earned her bachelor's degree in economics from Willamette University in Salem, Oregon. In 2005 she joined Teach For America and spent two years teaching middle school math in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Amelia then left the classroom to work as a director in a local non-profit, designing and managing after-school programs and community dialogue initiatives in the Baton Rouge area. In 2008, she returned to Teach For America as a program director for the South Louisiana region, training new leaders to make an impact teaching in inner city and rural schools. This summer she continued her work with Teach For America as a curriculum specialist at the first rural summer institute in the Mississippi Delta. Currently, she is pursuing a master's degree in public policy with a focus on community and economic development and education

policy at the University of Minnesota's Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs.

**Nick Patnode** is a recent graduate of the University of Minnesota with bachelor's degrees in political science and global studies and minors in German and teaching English as a second language. He will be the new communications and outreach intern with Growth & Justice this fall. Additionally, Nick is working as the public policy intern at the Minnesota AIDS Project in Minneapolis. He recently returned from Berlin, Germany where he received a fellowship to conduct research and teach English to schoolchildren. Nick hopes that through his internships, he will develop a better understanding of the nonprofit sector and increase his passion for further nonprofit and public affairs work. Within the next year or two he expects to investigate graduate programs in public policy, political science and international affairs. 