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GROWTH & JUSTICE

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Clear Directions Emerging in Project to Create a New Economic Agenda for Minnesota

BY JOEL KRAMER

We're halfway through the first phase of our ambitious new effort to propose a New Economic Agenda for Minnesota, and it's shaping up to be as stimulating, provocative and potentially important as we had hoped.

The goal is twofold:

- To develop an actionable strategy for Minnesota based on prosperity, sustainability, economic justice and fiscal discipline; and
- Articulate and communicate this strategy to help build a broad new majority in Minnesota for progressive economic outcomes.

The project's steering committee, composed of a dozen leaders in the business, labor, faith and nonprofit communities who have agreed to work to achieve consensus, has met once a month starting last November, and hopes to agree on a broad strategy for state government and a set of key messages by this June. The work is supported by an additional committee of advisers on message and communication, a set of outside research advisers, and by Growth & Justice staff. In addition to the previously announced grant of \$75,000 from the Carl and Eloise Pohlada Family Foundation, the project also has received a \$100,000 grant from the McKnight Foundation, as well as numerous individual contributions ranging from \$1,000 to \$10,000.



Steering committee members at work on the New Economic Agenda in one of their early meetings.

A strategy is starting to emerge from the process

It's still too soon to say what the final New Economic Agenda proposal will look like, but some things are clear:

- **A clear vision for our state:** Our steering committee, despite its diversity of backgrounds and policy perspectives, had little trouble agreeing on a vision for the kind of Minnesota we want, and the role state government can play to help make such a vision a reality. There were areas of less agreement about the best *approach* for government, so we agreed to concentrate on those approaches that are most unifying for the broad range of progressive-minded leaders on the committee.

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- **Minnesotans willing to invest; want discipline and accountability:** New research we conducted for the project reinforces that a clear majority of Minnesotans are willing to support more government investment in the areas that they believe matter most to Minnesota's future. And their support becomes greater and more intense if we propose raising the money fairly and spending it with fiscal and programmatic accountability. That includes a clear point of view about how fast government should grow.
- **Identifying clear outcomes and measures of success could be powerful:** Agreeing on priorities and the goals and high-level measures of success for those policy priorities is a crucial component of ensuring that our agenda is disciplined and accountable. A short list of goals and measures will not cover everything that people want for Minnesota, and it will not capture all the nuances and complexities of public policy. But a short list can have great power in building public understanding and support, and can provide strong

guidance in setting priorities and allocating resources.

investing more in the capacity of our people and infrastructure to create future

Our goal is to develop an actionable strategy for Minnesota based on prosperity, sustainability, economic justice and fiscal discipline.

- **Establishing the direction to be followed by more intense work on how to get there:** If we agree, say, on high-level measures for public education as part of this project, then a natural next step would be a comprehensive public education project that delves more deeply into the best (and most cost-effective) ways to move the needle on those strategic measures. The same is true for health and other key policy arenas.
- **A real difference between investing and spending:** Progressive-minded Minnesota leaders can and should unite around shifting from a mentality of spending on government services to

prosperity and well-being. This needs to be a real shift, not a rhetorical one.

Tell us what you think

Starting in April, we will be seeking feedback on our New Economic Agenda project in a number of ways. We will conduct roundtable discussions and offer a Test Tank on the web, a chance for you to wrestle with some of the same issues the steering committee is working through. In the past, this civic engagement phase has substantially improved our work, and we fully expect the same result this time around. Check our website for more details at www.growthandjustice.org. We look forward to your input.

Rethinking Public Education Project Up Next

Last spring Growth & Justice conducted roundtable discussions with friends and advisers about what policy topic to tackle next. In addition to the New Economic Agenda, there was a lot of energy for the idea of creating a fresh policy agenda for public education that defines successful performance at every level from early childhood to post-secondary attainment.

The broader project, **Creating a New Economic Agenda**, was first on the docket and that project will establish an overall strategic direction for the state, including high-level measurable outcomes for public education and other policy priority areas. The next project, **Rethinking Public Education**, will then take those high-level measures and work to develop consensus

on a specific public education agenda – identifying the best paths to achieving the outcomes, as well as who is accountable for them. Like the New Economic Agenda project, we will bring together a diverse group of progressive-minded leaders and stakeholders to form a steering committee to work through issues and come to consensus on the education agenda. The education project will build on the work of the New Economic Agenda project and drill deeper into specific policy prescriptions in the education arena.

The expected outcomes of the education project are:

- A set of strategic measures which divergent groups and stakeholders have agreed are reasonable benchmarks of educational success [from the New Economic Agenda project].

- Broad consensus on goals, and who is accountable for achieving them.
- Innovative and realistic policies aimed at achieving those goals over the next 10 years.
- The support of a substantial majority of Minnesotans for the policy prescriptions set forth in the educational agenda.

Over the next six months, Growth & Justice will compile background research on the education project, meet with stakeholders, and garner financial support for the work. Depending on resources, the more public phase of the education work is expected to start sometime later this year. Stay tuned for more information in upcoming newsletters and on our website, www.growthandjustice.org.

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—JOHN JAMES, Attorney, Lommen, Abdo Cole King Stageberg, former Minnesota Commissioner of Revenue, and Growth & Justice donor

GROWTH & JUSTICE

is a think tank for Minnesota economic policy focused on achieving economic growth, economic justice, and environmental sustainability simultaneously.

GROWTH & JUSTICE believes that at a time of deep partisan division, Minnesotans can unite around one goal: a state economy that is strong and growing, while providing a decent standard of living for all.

Growth & Justice Welcomes New Faces

New Development Director, **Ana Micka**, is one of several people who are bringing new energy and ideas to Growth & Justice. Ana joined Growth & Justice in February 2006. She will hire and supervise a new full-time Development Associate.



Ana Micka

For more than 15 years, Ana has led fundraising efforts for progressive non-profit organizations and political candidates. She has served as Finance Director for more than 10 federal-level political campaigns, contributing to the election of several members of Congress. Ana got her start in college as a canvass director and statewide chair of MN Public Interest Research Group. She has also directed fundraising efforts for Progressive Majority, Citizens for Health and the Organic Consumers Association. Ana works part-time for Growth & Justice and also serves as co-coordinator of the Reuniting America Project and is organizing Institute for Ag & Trade Policy's 20th Anniversary Gala.

Also joining Growth & Justice on a part-time basis are **Sue Herridge**, **Siri Anderson** and **Jonathan Weiss**. Sue is a communications and marketing consultant assisting Growth & Justice in the short-term with development and communications. Siri and Jonathan are providing research assistance on the New Economic Agenda and Rethinking Public Education projects. Growth & Justice interns this spring are **Andrea Lindgren** and **Jon Fure**. You can read more about all Growth & Justice team members on our website, www.growthandjustice.org.

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