

March 11, 2017 SD 57 Town Hall – Unanswered Questions

What will you do to protect MN kids with IEPs? I am worried that funding will go away.

Senator Clausen: Students with disabilities as identified by individual education plans (IEPs) have special protections under the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). I have the opportunity to sit on the Education Policy Committee this session, and I can tell you unequivocally that I do not support cutting funding for special education funding. As we move through the biennial budget process, choices will have to be made about where to spend limited funding. I plan to fight any attempt to provide across the board tax cuts which could affect funding for our education programs.

How will you protect the rights of young women seeking healthcare choices in the state of MN as the ACA gets repealed and replaced?

Senator Clausen: I will continue to support funding for health care clinics like Planned Parenthood, which provides vital services to over 2.7 million women in the U.S. annually. Our district is home to a Planned Parenthood clinic which provides birth control, STD testing, men and women's health care, pregnancy testing services, treatment and vaccines, and more. In addition, I continue to support the MinnesotaCare Buy-In option to give Minnesotans an affordable and quality health care option.

What is your stance on SF 292/HF 238, the "Stand Your Ground" bill?

Senator Clausen: I am opposed. The bill has the potential to turn volatile situations deadly with a broad exemption from criminal consequences for the use of deadly force. This proposal does not even require a person to attempt to retreat from a potentially dangerous situation before taking lethal action. Law enforcement has also stated their opposition to this bill.

What is your stance on SF 650/HF 188, the bill eliminating permit requirements for firearms?

Senator Clausen: I am opposed. In past sessions, I have been in favor of strengthening our background check system. I believe eliminating permit requirements would only serve to weaken our existing gun safety laws and make our communities unsafe.

What is your position on universal background checks?

Senator Clausen: Strongly in favor, along with 82% of Minnesotans and 74% of NRA members. We need to keep firearms out of the hands of violent felons and those with mental illnesses.

How do you reconcile Second Amendment protections with the Stand Your Ground and firearm permit legislation this session?

Senator Clausen: I am an owner of firearms myself, but I strongly believe the Second Amendment allows for reasonable restrictions on use and ownership. The Second Amendment

itself makes clear that access to and sale of firearms can be “Well regulated,” and I believe that extends to limiting the sale of exceptionally destructive weapons with no civilian use and making certain that those most likely to misuse firearms are not allowed access to them.

What bills will you be introducing or supporting to address mental health issues in relation to gun violence?

Senator Clausen: One of the biggest issues we have in this state is access to adequate mental health care. I have introduced bills establishing clinical training sites for mental health professionals, additional school district mental health funding, expanding coverage of mental health services, adding requirements for mental health training, and creating new mental health training programs.

What is your stance on HF 10, which would transfer MNsure to the federal marketplace? If the federal marketplace is eliminated, do you believe this bill would leave Minnesotans without available insurance options?

Senator Clausen: It is important to note that MNsure is simply a website which provides information on available private insurance plans. Simply eliminating the website and moving to the federal website will do nothing to address issues within the individual private market. This session, I am supporting the MinnesotaCare Buy-In option to provide Minnesotans with additional comprehensive individual insurance plans.

What are the contentious issues this session and what is your approach to those?

Senator Clausen: In a budget year, there are numerous fiscal and policy debates which will prove contentious in the Legislature, so unfortunately there are too many to list here. I have always attempted to reach across the aisle as a Senator with over 80% of my bills having Republican co-signers. This session I have been working alongside my GOP and DFL colleagues to find common ground on issues like teacher licensure, higher education budget and policy, and education budget and policy. I plan to continue my open and honest discussions with my colleagues from both parties, while keeping in mind that my ultimate responsibility is to represent the people of my district.

What are your thoughts on what we can do to provide protections for parent choices to ensure children have medical options available to them for struggles related to their gender identity?

Senator Clausen: With the current Legislature, I do not see any additional protections for this coverage even being considered. I can tell you that I strongly oppose the House bill to deny health coverage for gender therapy, HF 1183.

Have you ever carried a bill at any time or been a primary author of a bill that's moved out of committee?

Senator Clausen: Yes! This session, many of my bills have both passed out of committee or been laid over for possible inclusion. That means that when omnibus policy or budget bills are compiled, my bill may be included in a larger proposal for an area like Education, Higher Education, Health and Human Services, or Taxes. In my first term, 46 of my bills became law.

Will you continue to support state and federal funding for Planned Parenthood?

Senator Clausen: Yes. As I mentioned in an earlier response, Planned Parenthood provides essential health coverage for both women and men in our state and community. No state or federal funding goes towards abortion services, so any push to defund Planned Parenthood only serves to limit access to cancer screenings, pregnancy tests, prenatal care, STD tests, birth control, education and information, and numerous other treatments.

How are you assisting to make our politics less adversarial and divided?

Senator Clausen: As I mentioned earlier, I plan to continue meeting with my colleagues across the aisle to both author bills and work to find common ground on others. We cannot continue to leave controversial proposals to the last second, and I have already begun discussions with my colleagues on numerous pieces of legislation to come to agreement on any provisions which may divide us. This past week I was asked to co-present an education teacher licensing bill authored by Senator Eric Pratt, R. Prior Lake. This is highly unusual and speaks to my interest in establishing relationships across the aisle.

What is your stance on manufactured home parks legislation?

Senator Clausen: I support the bills moving through the Legislature to open manufactured home grants to nonprofits and cooperatives and to add improvements and infrastructure to eligible uses of grants. Our district has five manufactured home communities, and I believe it is important to provide the needed upgrades.

How does voting according to party line serve the people?

Senator Clausen: Simply voting along party lines does not serve my constituents. It is important to note that the vast majority of bills which come before the Legislature are bipartisan and unanimously supported. However, many of the bills which grab headlines are those that are controversial. I do not vote according to the wishes of one party or the other, but on contentious bills, I often agree with the majority of members in my party due to our political values and ideals.

What are you doing in light of the big changes within the U.S. Department of Education to maintain our quality of education in ISD 196?

Senator Clausen: One advantage I have in education decision making is my background in education. At the state level, I will continue to support full funding for our public schools. I will also resist attempts to endanger education funding in attempts to score political points by providing across the board tax breaks which favor the wealthy. The increase made to the top Minnesota tax bracket in 2013 provided funding for all-day kindergarten and early childhood programs. These programs have proven successful and are needed to provide the skills and knowledge required of future generations. We need a fiscally sound budget which balances targeted tax relief for the lower and middle class families while providing quality public education for all Minnesotans.

Are disability related issues one of your main focal points of care?

Senator Clausen: Much of my health care focus has been on issues related to workforce shortages. For many people with disabilities, a lack of available health care workers and high turnover rates can lead to poor health outcomes and services. I have introduced legislation on this issue aimed at strengthening our workforce so that all Minnesotans have access to quality care. I will also continue to support additional funding for programs like MFIP, the lowering of TEFRA fees, and additional investments in human services programs.

Do you know or have received/given money to George Soros?

Senator Clausen: I have not met George Soros nor have I received or provided funds to Mr. Soros. I actually had to google search to identify Mr. Soros.

Why does this state keep taking in refugees and welfare people?

Senator Clausen: It is important to note that refugees make up less than 2% of public assistance costs in Minnesota. As such, claims that they cost our state significant amounts of money is simply untrue. Many refugees we take in are highly skilled and add to our workforce, and for those who do not have transferrable skills, many partake in educational opportunities to further their skills and contribute to our economy. I believe it is a moral and economic benefit to our state to continue providing such a small amount of public assistance for those in humanitarian need.

Do you plan to support light rail funding?

Senator Clausen: Last session I supported a proposal to allow the metro area to fund a transportation initiative in order to obtain matching federal funding. Unfortunately, even allowing local governments to control their own affairs became a political tool, and that legislation was not passed. Since then, new funding mechanisms have been decided upon, and there is no longer a need for legislative funding for light rail.

Do you have concerns about ineligible voting or fraud in our state?

Senator Clausen: No. Voter fraud is exceedingly rare, with only 31 cases from 2000-2014. During that time, over 1 billion total votes were cast. I am more interested in improving our election administration to ensure clean and accurate voting registration lists and increasing participation in our elections.

Have you contacted our federal elected officials about support for getting wolves off the endangered species list? Minnesota has 4,000 of them.

Senator Clausen: I have not, but thank you for bringing this to my attention. It appears Senator Klobuchar has introduced legislation to remove wolves from the endangered species list now that their population has exceeded original goals. I will certainly read more about this as it works through the federal process.

What are your thoughts on SF 143, 219, and 1129 relating to vaccination exemptions?

Senator Clausen: I believe requiring vaccinations to be in the interest of public safety. All vaccines undergo long and careful review by scientists, doctors and the federal government. Vaccination has led to a dramatic decline in the number of U.S. cases of several infectious diseases.

Is there any way the state can ban federal representatives from only holding phone town halls?

Senator Clausen: Great question. Unfortunately, I do not believe such a law would be constitutional. However, I certainly do suggest all elected officials hold regular, in-person town halls with as many constituents as possible.

Please speak to your stance on mental health parity.

Senator Clausen: I have been a strong supporter in advancing mental health initiatives. I authored a bill in 2013 to sponsor a Mental Health Forum, bringing together several hundred mental health providers from across Minnesota to identify and discuss mental health needs and solutions. The Forum resulted in a number of mental health initiatives including expanding the mental health workforce and providing mental health counseling services in our schools. I have received the Paul Wellstone Mental Health Advocacy Award and two NAMI awards for my mental health initiatives.

Why is the Legislature focused on rolling back LGBTQ rights with bills like HF 41, HF 23, HF 43, and HF 1183?

Senator Clausen: I cannot speak to the motivations behind such bills, but I can say definitively that I am against each of the proposals listed. The Senate has not taken up the issues represented in the House bills you have identified. None of the identified House bills have a Senate companion bill. Perhaps the Senate has moved beyond these issues.

Is there a rural vs. metro atmosphere in this legislative session?

Senator Clausen: Unfortunately rural vs. metro has become a major divisive issue in our state and is being used for political gain by both parties. The 2016 election results demonstrate a need to develop a “one Minnesota” agenda to bring Minnesotans together. Jobs, economic security, housing, education are needed for all Minnesotans. The legislature needs to set differences aside and make decisions for all rural and metro Minnesotans.

Do you believe the Met Council should be elected for more visibility and accountability?

Senator Clausen: All major metropolitan areas must have a regional governance entity similar to the Met Council to receive federal funding. The Met Council serves as a regional planning agency, policy making body and provider of essential services. Elected Met Council members will be confronted with conflict of interest issues when making decisions effecting their constituents. I support the idea of independentlu appointed members.

Why does Minnesota not have a “civics initiative”?

Senator Clausen: S.F. 773 proposes a mandatory citizenship curriculum that includes civics instruction. The bill has been referred to the E-12 Policy Committee but did not receive a hearing. In 2015 a bill was proposed requiring a 100 question “civics exam” for graduation.

If one million working poor are cut from federal Medicaid expansion in MN, how will we cover them?

Senator Clausen: Good question. The state of Minnesota will either make-up the funding (not sure from where), discontinue the program, cut other programs to free-up funds for the program or change eligibility requirements to eliminate the eligibility number to accommodate budget realities. As with many of the proposals coming from Washington, there are severe consequences at the state level.

What is your stance on the proposed federal health care reforms?

Senator Clausen: I have two major concerns with the repeal of the Affordable Care Act. Repealing the insurance premium tax credits and repeal of the expansion of Medicare eligibility. These two actions will have a serious economic impact upon states. Also of concern is the number of Americans losing health insurance, estimated to be 24 to 26 million, who will be visiting hospital emergency rooms for care resulting in higher medical care costs.

Do you support strong teacher licensing standards, even with teacher shortages looming? Is it true there is a House bill which only requires a high school diploma for some positions?

Senator Clausen: This is an issue I have spent a considerable amount of time on this session. Teacher licensing is undergoing major modifications during the current legislative session. During the 2016 legislative session, the Office of the Legislative Auditor (OLA) issued a report on Minnesota licensing deficiencies with recommendations. These recommendations are

included in S.F. 4 and include a four tiered licensing structure. As a minority member of the E-12 Education Policy Committee, I have worked to maintain high teacher licensure standards while adhering to the recommendations of the OLA knowing teacher shortages are a major issue in Minnesota. I have not had an opportunity to review the House bill however, there is a provision in the Senate bill that a career and technical education course could be taught by a person with 5 years work experience in the content area. The candidate must participate in a school district mentor program that includes an individual growth and development plan. A major issue in this language is a controversy over how long a person with these qualifications could teach. I authored a bill, SF 1046, which would establish a nontraditional program through which a person could earn a teaching degree within two years.

Will Minnesota's Constitution include the ERA?

Senator Clausen: The Equal Rights Amendment was originally introduced to Congress in 1923. In 1972 the ERA passed both houses of Congress and was submitted to state legislatures for ratification. To date, I believe 30 of the needed 38 states have ratified the ERA. Minnesota ratified the ERA in February 1973. However, the deadline for ratification expired before 38 states voted in favor of ratification. At this time, there are two bills focusing on the ERA Amendment in the Minnesota legislature. The first seeks to remove the federal ratification deadline which would allow three more states to ratify the ERA into the U.S. Constitution (S.F. 229 did not receive a hearing). The second bill (S.F. 224) is a constitutional amendment to add the ERA to the Minnesota constitution but did not receive a hearing.

How do we make bills more understandable for citizens? I believe we need to have functional standards of a bill so people can understand the top 10 reasons a bill should or shouldn't pass?

Senator Clausen: Research summaries on bills to be heard by a committee are available online for review. Contacting your legislative representative for further information is also an option.

There are trainings to be a Senator or Representatives, but are there trainings for how to be a good and motivated citizen?

Senator Clausen: I believe citizenship has responsibilities that include being an informed individual who seeks opportunities for involvement within their community. Attending our town hall meeting is one example of becoming educated on issues of community and state importance. Other examples include involvement in nonprofit organizations, attending city council meetings, volunteering for school board, city or county citizen appointed committees or attending local political party meetings. Being a good citizen requires active involvement by seeking opportunities to be informed and to serve your community.

Not every young person wants to or is suited for four year college degrees. What are your thoughts on technical education in Middle and High School?

Senator Clausen: This is a significant issue facing Minnesota workforce needs. Career and technical education over time has been diminished in our schools. Testing requirements and the costs associated with equipment needed for career and technical education programs have been

major factors in this decline. Schools are currently implementing STEM programs with a focus on hands-on learning. Examples include Project Lead the Way courses, High Mileage and Robotics Competitions. In 2015, the legislature passed an initiative which provides free tuition for students enrolled in two year programs identified as high need occupations in Minnesota. We need to invest and encourage career and technical education programs in our schools. I have authored bills to support STEM courses, workforce initiatives, and served as co-chair for three years on the Legislative Health Care Workforce Commission to address specific health care workforce needs. Some of these initiatives provided opportunities for students to gain knowledge and experiences in career and technical education occupations.

Do you support reducing the special education cross-subsidy?

Senator Clausen: The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) was passed by Congress in 1975 but never fully funded by the federal government. State governments were left to make-up the funding difference which has not occurred resulting in special education cross-subsidy funding from school district general fund accounts. In District 196 the cross-subsidy is approximately \$25 million annually. This issue is discussed annually in the Minnesota legislature without significant movement. Governor Dayton, in his 2017-2018 budget proposal, has allocated funds to help off-set the cross-subsidy. However, the amount is insufficient to remove the cross-subsidy from school district budgets. I support the Governor's proposal and believe more must be done to address this issue.

What is your position on HF 1433 and SF 1087/HF 1291 relating to environmental protections?

Senator Clausen: These bills modify permitting requirements, eliminate the Environmental Quality Board, provide expedited environmental review procedures and modify reclamation appeal provisions. These provisions are initiatives which are not in the best interests of our environment. Environmental protection statutes should protect the environment through a thorough review process rather than expedited permitting processes.

What is your stance on the Governor's proposed expansion of MinnesotaCare?

Senator Clausen: I support the Governor's proposal which provides for a long-term state-wide stability through MinnesotaCare. Unfortunately, this past week the Senate passed on a partisan vote to spend close to \$1 billion over two years for a temporary "fix". The chief author when presenting the bill on the Senate floor indicated his bill could save between 18 to 25 percent on insurance premiums or premiums could increase. Not much assurance for nearly a \$1 billion dollar investment. The bill also takes \$180 million a year from the Health Care Access Fund to fund the reinsurance program, taking money away from low income Minnesotans.

Why did you vote the way you did on Sunday liquor sales?

Senator Clausen: On two occasions I have voted against Sunday liquor sales. Apple Valley and Lakeville, which I represent, have municipal liquor stores and opposed Sunday sales initiatives. I also have a constituent who is a liquor store owner who opposed Sunday sales. For these reasons I have opposed the Sunday sales bill. Recently however, I received several voice mails,

visits and emails from constituents in favor of Sunday sales, 200 for 16 against. I felt obligated to support the majority of constituents contacting on the issue.

Is it true that the Legislature voted themselves a 40% raise?

Senator Clausen: Minnesota voters approved a constitutional amendment in 2016 to establish a 15 member citizen bipartisan Legislative Salary Commission to make decisions on legislative compensation which has not been raised since 1999. The council has recommended a salary increase from \$31,000 to \$45,000 annually. The decision to raise legislator's compensation rests in the hands of the citizens Legislative Salary Commission.

Why should the entire surplus not be returned to Minnesotans?

Senator Clausen: Minnesota's budget forecast indicates a \$1.6 billion surplus. \$334 million, under state law, is dedicated to the budget reserve leaving a \$1.3 billion forecasted surplus. I would like to emphasize "forecasted surplus" since these funds have not yet been collected. Inflation has to be factored into the budget for existing obligations also lowering the forecasted surplus. I do support returning a large portion of the projected surplus to the public but as targeted initiatives and assistance. I would like to see a tax credit for 529 College Savings Plans, tax credit assistance for students and parents paying on student loans, a formula change and additional investment in the Minnesota Student Grant Programs, increased funding for higher education, child care tax credit assistance for low and middle income families, assistance for farm owners impacted by school referendums, targeted tax relief for small businesses, continuing investment in our public schools through an increase in the per pupil formula, and additional special education funding to avoid general fund crossover subsidies. In addition, we need to invest in future workforce initiatives, transportation and health and human services programs. As a state we need to make investments today for tomorrow.

Do you support the best life alliance bill to address workforce shortages affecting the care of people with developmental and intellectual disabilities?

Senator Clausen: Yes, Minnesota's Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) allows people with physical and intellectual disabilities to be independent through the help of direct care workers. Unfortunately this workforce is in need of assistance. The compensation for these workers is directly tied to state reimbursement rates set by the legislature and has not kept pace with actual costs. S.F. 669 proposes a 4% wage increase in 2017 and 4% in 2018. The bill has bipartisan support.

What is your stance on legislation expanding the size of factory farms before environmental review?

Senator Clausen: Environmental review is an important part of the licensing/regulatory process. I know additional "regulations" are not popular but the impact on the environment must be considered and protected. Clean air and clean water are basic needs from a health and safety perspective.

Do you support funding for reading and math corps?

Senator Clausen: I have attended Reading Corp training sessions and visited schools where Reading Corps instruction has been implemented. I believe Reading Corp is most effective when addressing the needs of students who are falling behind but it is not a program for students identified with a reading disability. These students need a different instructional intervention. I support the one on one reading intervention Reading Corps brings to the classroom. Another trained adult in the classroom, assisting and working in conjunction with the teacher can be of great assistance and provides the additional attention needed to assist a student falling behind.

What is your stance on buffer requirements and other clean water initiatives?

Senator Clausen: We have reached a tipping point in Minnesota in terms of our clean water supply. There are rural areas in Minnesota where the well water is contaminated and undrinkable. Our streams, lakes and rivers are showing increased signs of eutrophic pollution. I support Governor Dayton's buffer initiative and also believe, as does the Governor, that we need to fairly compensate farmers for land being taken out of production.

How are you and the Legislature addressing human rights, civil rights, and equality for all in workplaces, schools, and our communities?

Senator Clausen: Human rights, civil rights, and equality are basic to our State and Federal Constitutions. However, we continue to have social and political issues challenging these basic human rights. I promise to fight against any attempts to discriminate against individuals based on their religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, or other characteristic. We have made incredible progress in our state and country in ensuring equal protection under law, and I do not plan on turning back the clock. Instead, we must continue

Is there concern about the large workload to fulfill compliance with REAL ID in the short time before the 2018 deadline?

Senator Clausen: The 2016 legislature passed, and the bill was signed by Governor Dayton, to begin the planning process to upgrade Minnesota driver's licenses in order to comply with the federal REAL ID Act. However, as you are aware, lawmakers have not passed a bill to make Minnesota driver's licenses compliant with federal law. The Department of Homeland Security has indicated an extension will be provided to states showing progress in implementing the REAL ID Act to October 1, 2020. I believe it is imperative that the Minnesota legislature pass a REAL ID law this session to continue the compliance process. Minnesota has also implemented an "Enhanced Driver's License" that meets the REAL ID requirements for domestic travel as an alternative.

What is your stance on HF 2364, changes to Minnesota's implied consent law?

Senator Clausen: As I understand the proposal, it would be a crime for a person to refuse to submit to a blood or urine test required by a search warrant if accused of driving impaired. The

refusal to comply with a search warrant would lead to license revocation. House File 2364 also provides for a due process provision. Highway safety is a major legislative responsibility. If all steps are taken by law enforcement within legally established protocol parameters, I support the proposal to revoke licenses when a motor vehicle operator refuses to obey a court order.