

**Remarks of Governor Mark Dayton—As Prepared for Delivery
State of the State Address
Wednesday, February 09, 2011**

A Five-Point Plan for Minnesota's Future Prosperity

On January 29, 2002, as a Minnesota Senator, I attended President George W. Bush's first State of the Union address. It occurred just four months after the terrible events of September 11, 2001.

He began with these words. "As we gather tonight, our nation is at war, our economy is in recession and the civilized world faces unprecedented dangers. Yet the state of our union has never been stronger."

The President's words rang true. On the night of 9/11, I had joined with other Members of Congress on the steps of the United States Capitol, which had been spared destruction that day by the heroic actions of passengers aboard United Flight #93, led by Minnesota native Thomas Burnett, Jr.

We gathered, not as Republicans or Democrats, but as Americans. We wanted to show our nation and the world that, despite the day's horrors, our country stood strong, our leaders were united, and our government was working . . . together.

A few days later, we went together to the Pentagon and to Ground Zero.

Then I traveled with a small bi-partisan group of Senators to Afghanistan, just after American forces had routed the Taliban and al Qaeda and reopened the American Embassy, though still surrounded by razor wire and Marines.

So, when I heard the President's words, "The state of our union has never been stronger," I agreed that 9/11's disaster had united our country, our citizens, and our leaders.

I would like to say the same about the state of Minnesota today. After the most terrible economic disaster since the Great Depression; after its harsh lessons that we are all Minnesotans, whose lives, fates, and fortunes are intertwined; I wish I could say that we are all united, as we gather here this afternoon.

Whether we unite or whether we divide is hanging in the balance. The challenges we face threaten to divide us, rather than bring us together. Partisan posturing and narrow agendas threaten to overwhelm bi-partisan cooperation and compromise.

I do see promising signs of bi-partisan accord. I appreciate the constructive relationships I have established with Speaker Zellers, Majority Leader Koch, and their leadership teams; as well as with Minority Leaders Bakk and Thissen and their teams.

On the other hand, in just the second week of the legislative session, there was a hearing held on the effects of a shutdown of state government next July. A shutdown which would occur ONLY if we fail to resolve our differences before adjournment 103 days from now.

On the night of 9/11, I stood with my fellow United States Senators and Representatives on the steps of our Capitol to assure our fellow citizens that our government had not shut down, would not shut down, could not be shut down.

It is absolutely unthinkable that we would even contemplate doing so here in Minnesota. So, I ask you, legislators; I invite you; I implore you -- to join with me now, right here in our Capitol and pledge to the people of Minnesota that we will NOT shut down their government, our government -- not next July 1st, not any July 1st, not any day ever.

It should not happen; it need not happen – not as long as we are willing to work together and to compromise our individual views for the common good.

Compromise doesn't mean we have to agree, thank goodness, because we won't. It doesn't mean we can't debate, because we will. It means we can disagree, debate, and then reach a shared solution to our state's problems.

If we do so, by working together, we can rightfully tell the people of Minnesota that we succeeded. We did the very best we could, given the very difficult circumstances we inherited.

And if we all succeed together, the people of Minnesota will win. If we fail, the people of Minnesota will lose. It's that simple. It's that inescapable.

Our shared success is essential to turn our state around and get us – all of us – working again. By all of us working together.

For many years, Minnesota was known as the state that worked.

Governor Wendell Anderson, who is with us here today, is the only Minnesota Governor ever to ascend to the cover of Time Magazine for his leadership in creating “The Minnesota Miracle.”

We were blessed with the largest number of Fortune 500 companies per capita of any state in the nation. Most of them were started here by Minnesotans, like my Great-Grandfather, and were built by business pioneers, like my Father, Bruce Dayton, who is here today, into successful national and international corporations.

They didn't succeed alone. Thousands of talented, well-educated, and productive Minnesotans worked hard together with them to achieve those tremendous successes.

Minnesota's economic ascendancy and social vitality were true public-private partnerships, and they occurred by the thousands throughout our state. In the fall of 1983, I traveled to Thief River Falls, as Commissioner of Economic Development, to award the first Enterprise Zone tax incentives, which Governor Rudy Perpich and the Minnesota Legislature had authorized that spring, to a seven-person business called Artco. Those business leaders and their hard-working employees built that small business into Arctic Cat, which employs well over a thousand people there.

It stands along side Digi-Key, another remarkable business success story, which its brilliant founder, Dr. Ronald Stordahl, started in his garage and which today employs some 2000 Minnesotans, who fulfill orders world-wide within 24 hours with 99.85% perfection.

Unfortunately, due to a combination of factors, Minnesota's economic success stalled during the past several years. During the last decade, Minnesota, which previously had been among the best states in the nation for economic growth and job creation, had one of the worst-performing economies.

According to a Wall Street Journal analysis, real median income in Minnesota fell by 9% from 1999 to 2008, over double the national decline of 4%. Only two other states had a worse decline. As a result, our per capita income fell from 7th highest among the states to 14th in 2009 .

Our employment growth averaged in the bottom ten among the fifty states during the past decade.

Last December, there were over 77,000 more Minnesotans unemployed than in December 2002, just before Governor Pawlenty took office. There were 5,881 fewer people working in Minnesota than there were eight years ago, even though our state's population grew during that time by over 286,000 people.

And it is worth noting that this decade of poor economic performance followed two consecutive cuts in the state income tax rates by Governor Ventura and that Minnesota Legislature in 1999 and 2000.

Fewer people paying lower taxes has meant state per-pupil aid for our students from kindergarten through 12th grade has been reduced by 14% in real, after-inflation dollars during the past 8 years. Tuition in our state's two-year public colleges has risen to the third highest in the nation; tuitions in our four-year universities are among the top ten highest.

Ten Minnesota school districts have gone to four-day school weeks, not for educational reasons, but rather for lack of money. Class sizes have grown, while thousands of talented teachers have been laid off. The average salary of those teachers who remain is 2% below the national average.

The number of road miles in poor and mediocre condition has more than doubled. Minnesota's rank among the 50 states in road condition has fallen from 8th to 27th.

Anyone who drives our state's deteriorating roads and highways, or is stuck in ever-longer metro traffic jams, or waits longer times for poorer bus service, wants a better Minnesota than this.

Any parent who has to find child care for their children because of four-day school weeks, while they're working five, wants a better Minnesota.

Any 5th grade teacher in a classroom with 36 students wants a better Minnesota.

Any college graduate, saddled with many thousands of dollars in student loans and unable to find a job, wants a better Minnesota. Anyone unable to find a job wants a better Minnesota.

Minnesotans want a better future. Minnesotans deserve a better future.

I can envision a better future.

I know what we must do to create that better future for all of us.

To progress, we have to invest. We have to invest in jobs; in education; in transportation; in the health of our people, communities, and environment; and in the transformation of government.

That is my Five-Point Plan for Future Prosperity. Invest in more jobs. Invest in better education. Invest in improved transportation. Invest in the health of our citizens, our communities, and our environment. Invest in the transformation of government services.

Investments require faith and trust. People invest in the future, only if they believe in that future. They invest, only if they trust their investing partners. They invest, only if they believe that others will do what is necessary for those investments to succeed.

To create together a successful Minnesota, we need to believe once again in each other and in our collective talents, abilities, and wisdom. We need to believe that our fellow Minnesotans are acting in good faith, doing their best, and that they, like us, want the best for their children, their communities, and our state.

So let us believe again in Minnesota. Let us believe again in one another. Let us invest together in our better future.

It begins with education.

I want to recognize and thank two of our most distinguished citizens, the retiring leaders of our two largest higher education institutions: the President of the University of Minnesota, Robert Bruininks, and the Chancellor of the Minnesota State College and university System, James McCormick.

President Bruininks has led the University of Minnesota with great distinction as its 15th President since 2002. He has served the University for 39 years, as professor, dean, executive vice president, provost, and president. Fortunately for all of us, he will continue his outstanding service to the University in a faculty position. DR. BRUININKS,

Chancellor McCormick began his service to Minnesota in 2001, as the leader of the MnSCU system of 32 higher education institutions statewide. He has given us a decade of strong, visionary guidance to bring those vitally important institutions together as one system. We thank him for his outstanding service to Minnesota. CHANCELLOR McCORMICK

Three other very distinguished educators are with us today.

Dr. Efe Agbamu is Minnesota's Secondary Principal of the Year.

Dr. Agbamu is currently Principal at Park High School in Cottage Grove, where she instituted an International Baccalaureate program. She is recognized for her "ability to achieve academic and

community goals, for improving teaching and learning and encouraging a positive school environment for staff and students.” DR. AGBAMU.

James Sonju, the Principal at Rochester’s Lincoln K-8 Choice School, is Minnesota’s Elementary School “Science and Mathematics Principal of the Year.” He was selected for his work integrating cutting-edge science throughout the curriculum and revolutionizing the way his school teaches science. MR. SONJU.

Ryan Vernosh is Minnesota’s Teacher of the Year. He is a 6th grade teacher at Maxfield Magnet School in St. Paul, where he has taught since 2006. He says the two biggest issues facing education are the achievement gap and social justice. “These gaps are unacceptable and are my driving force as I prepare to teach every day.” MR. VERNOSH.

I salute these five great Minnesotans and all of our state’s outstanding educators. They know, as I do, that better education is key to a better Minnesota. It is why I was so pleased to re-affirm last week my promise to increase state funding for public K-12 education every year I am Governor, with no excuses and no exceptions.

Our children’s futures are in our hands. Their futures are our responsibility.

I ask the Legislature to follow my lead and increase state funding for K-12 education.

That doesn’t mean more money to maintain the status quo. To the contrary, every additional dollar we spend on education should be directed toward improving the quality of that education.

Starting with the experiences we provide our state’s children in the very first months and years of their lives.

I have been greatly impressed with the careful thought being devoted by many dedicated adults to the best use of our resources for early childhood education.

That is why I will re-establish the Governor’s Council on Early Childhood Education and the Children’s Cabinet, both to be led by Education Commissioner Brenda Cassellius.

This is a terrific opportunity for continued public-private partnerships, involving business leaders, foundation executives, parents, educators, and everyone else who cares about our children and their success.

Then we need to commit more state money to providing all parents with the option of affordable all-day kindergarten for their children. How can states like Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi fund all-day kindergarten, while we in Minnesota do not?

Despite our deficit, my budget will propose increased funding to expand the number of children who can receive all-day kindergarten. I ask the Legislature to help me find the additional money as soon as possible to make all-day kindergarten an option for every child in Minnesota.

In our shared desire to improve our elementary and secondary schools, our colleges, and our universities, I urge all of us to work together – instead of against one another.

For too long, teachers and other educators have been battered by continuing criticisms of their commitment, their ability, and their effectiveness. For too long, words like accountability, responsibility, and acceptable progress have been used to imply that there is none.

To say that is untrue does not mean we are satisfied with every aspect of our educational services today. It means that we are going to take a different approach to making them better.

We are going to listen to one another's concerns; we are going to work cooperatively and constructively; and we are going to enlist the best ideas from the real experts: the parents, teachers, principals, and superintendents, who are most in touch every day with our students and their needs.

As someone said, all the reform we could possibly use is available to us right now in those schools, colleges, and universities, which are educating students most successfully.

We need to identify those successes, share their strategies, and both encourage and require their use elsewhere.

I again ask every business in Minnesota to adopt a school, college, or university: to become actively involved in making them better. They will benefit from you, and you will learn from them.

Another crucial area of investment is in transportation. Minnesota suffers today from the failed legacy of twenty years of declining investments in our highways, roads, and bridges; in our public transit systems; and in other critical infrastructure. Our decline has been worse than most other states, which means we are falling further behind in what I consider one of the most important "business climate" measures: the quality and capacity of our transportation systems and other infrastructure.

It doesn't have to be that way. Look at our Metropolitan International Airport, where new investments have been made continuously during those same twenty years.

It's not perfect, but it's remarkable. Virtually an entire new airport has been constructed while continuing to operate the old one. It is rated one of the best-managed airports in the country and even the world.

Or consider the recently completed Highway 62 interchange, also built while remaining open for traffic. It's not perfect; yet it's a big improvement, and it provides for better public transit as well.

The notion we don't know how to invest in critical infrastructure improvements, or to implement those projects efficiently, is foolish. What's even more foolish, however, is our failure to make necessary investments in them. The results are deteriorating highways throughout Greater Minnesota and worsening congestion in our metro system.

Roads, highways, and public transit are to our state's economy, as are arteries to the human body.

If the arteries are healthy, and efficiently transport blood, oxygen, and nutrients throughout the body, everything works at its best. If, however, the arteries become decrepit or clogged, the body's performance suffers.

Minnesota is at a critical juncture with its transportation systems. Our investments are inadequate to maintain their condition or expand them to serve our growing population.

Their further deterioration will seriously constrict our future economic growth and damage our social vitality.

That is why I have asked Transportation Commissioner Tom Sorel to present to the Legislature his ideas for better roads, highways, and transit systems, and to begin the discussion of how best to finance them. I invite others with transportation and finance expertise in both the private and public sectors to join us in that discussion.

I ask the Legislature to consider creating a Transportation Finance Authority, chaired by the MnDOT Commissioner, to bring together the best minds and their ideas for financing the transportation improvements upon which our future social and economic vitality depend.

Third, we have to invest in the health, safety, and well-being of our citizens, our communities, and our environment.

Fortunately for all of us, there are so many Minnesotans who go to work every day to make our lives better.

I especially want to honor today the men and women who risk their lives to keep our lives safe.

Col. Eric Kerska is the Commander of the Minnesota National Guard's 1st Brigade Combat Team, 34th Infantry Division. The Red Bulls!

He will lead the 2,400 citizen soldiers of the 1st Brigade, when they deploy in May to support, for one year, Operation New Dawn, the drawdown phase of U.S. military operations in Iraq.

Col. Kerska has been a National Guardsman for over 21 years and a soldier for over 27 years. In his civilian career, he is a battalion chief for the Rochester Fire Department – a job he will put on hold while he serves his third tour of duty.

He is joined today by his wife, Tina, who is equally a Minnesota hero for her sacrifice in giving up her husband for the next year to protect our country. COLONEL ERIC and TINA KERSKA.

With us also is a family of Minnesota heroes: 1st Sergeant Gary Wenzel, his wife Cathy, and their 18 year-old son, Private First Class Todd Wenzel.

1st Sergeant Wenzel has been deployed twice. During his 18-month tour in Iraq in 2004-2005, Cathy Wenzel founded "Project Backpack," for military sons and daughters; and another organization, "Minnesota Veteran Family Support," providing families with services before, during, and after military deployment.

Today, the Wenzel's oldest son, Andrew, is on his way to Afghanistan; and Todd will be deploying with the 1st Brigade Combat Team later this spring.

PLEASE JOIN WITH ME IN PAYING TRIBUTE TO THIS EXCEPTIONAL MINNESOTA FAMILY:
1ST SERGEANT GARY, CATHY, AND PRIVATE TODD WENZEL.

Colonel Kerska and Private Wenzel, please extend to all of the 2400 men and women in your Red Bull unit our deepest gratitude for their heroic service to our state and nation, and our heartfelt prayers for all of your safe return.

Closer to home we are protected by the courageous women and men, who wear the uniforms of law enforcement officers throughout our state. We are honored today by the presence of the Police Officer of the Year, Adam Bailey.

Officer Bailey has been with the St. Paul Police for 6 years; previously he served with the St. Louis Park Police.

He was named the Minnesota Police and Peace Officers Association's Police Officer of the Year for his outstanding service.

Officer Bailey has also been awarded the City of St. Paul's highest honor – the Medal of Valor – for his extraordinary heroism in the line of duty. OFFICER ADAM BAILEY.

To Officer Bailey and all the Minnesotans in uniform, who risk their lives every day and night to keep all of us safe, please accept our deepest gratitude for your dedicated and heroic service.

In addition to protecting the safety of our citizens, we must do everything possible to protect their health and well-being. The best possible and most affordable health care for all of our citizens is far too important to become a political football in the 2012 Presidential Superbowl.

Minnesota has long been a national leader in health care innovation, and our citizens everywhere have benefitted enormously from that leadership.

When my Mother was hospitalized in New York City before her passing, I learned there is no private or public hospital there, at any price, which provides a quality of care that is routine throughout Minnesota. Nor can one find the quality of doctors, nurses, and other health care providers.

Those professionals, clinics, and hospitals are absolutely priceless. All Minnesotans need and deserve access to them at the most affordable prices. We can have our honest disagreements about how best to achieve that goal.

Let us promise, however, that our disagreements will be based upon honest differences over policies, not politics.

Fourth, we need transform how we provide our citizens with the best public services, most efficiently, at the lowest cost.

This is a clear but daunting challenge: How do we improve government services and performance while we also cut costs?

Minnesota is not alone. Republican and Democratic governors and legislators across the country are grappling with this crisis.

The best of them are realizing, as my son, Eric's, business school professor told him, a crisis is a terrible thing to waste, and they are getting down to business. That is what we need to do in Minnesota.

Improving government's efficiency and service quality while reducing its cost has bipartisan support -- and leadership in both the public and private sectors. I want to thank General Mills for their support of our state's Enterprise LEAN business process improvement initiative. This initiative has improved service and cut costs; it will be expanded.

We need to do more, and we will. I want to combine the best private sector expertise with our public sector experience, to make Minnesota government the best in the world.

Our Administration will lead the way. I have asked Lt. Governor Yvonne Prettner Solon and our Chief of Staff, Tina Smith, to head this effort, along with MMB Commissioner Jim Schowalter, Administration Commissioner Spencer Cronk, and Office of Enterprise Technology Commissioner Carolyn Parnell.

I have asked them to immediately identify cost savings. For example, Minnesota has already spent \$168 million in this biennium on office technology, like computers and desktop printers. Local governments spent an additional \$228 million. What if we pooled our purchasing power to get a better deal for Minnesota taxpayers?

We will examine every area of expenditure and contracting to find ways to cut costs, while improving services.

Longer term, we need transformational change to improve the productivity of government, and bring it fully into the 21st century. The opportunities are huge, and the savings can be enormous.

This reform will succeed best, if we work in partnership with our state employees.

The good ideas for improvements and efficiencies often come from the people who work in government every day. Treating them with the dignity and respect they deserve will be essential to our success.

Fifth, and most important, we need our business leaders to believe in Minnesota, to invest in our state, and to create more jobs for the thousands of our citizens, who want to work.

We also need better working partnerships between our state's businesses, colleges and universities, other civic organizations, and state and local governments.

We all agree upon the need to create more jobs. Putting more people to work throughout Minnesota is essential to our economic recovery, to our social well-being, to a better future for all of us.

I am pleased to report to our fellow citizens that the Legislature and I have found areas of cooperative agreement.

We agree that our state's permitting and approval processes for new and expanding businesses have been taking unreasonably long; and we are united in our determination to shorten them, while protecting our citizens and our environment.

Two weeks ago, I signed an Executive Order to begin that streamlining process immediately. DNR Commissioner Tom Landwehr and MPCA Commissioner Paul Aasen have been working with legislative leaders of both parties to put those and other improvements into legislation.

I thank Speaker Zellers, Majority Leader Koch, and the other legislators, who are working with us to achieve this progress. May it characterize our cooperative spirit throughout the rest of the session.

I hope that we can find that same cooperative spirit to pass the statewide bonding bill, which I proposed last week.

Those investments will help build a better Minnesota for generations to come. National economists, commenting on continuing high unemployment, say a crucial factor holding back job growth is that construction has not yet revived.

That is my Bonding Bill's initial purpose: to put up to 28,000 unemployed Minnesotans in the private-sector construction industry back to work.

And, through those long-term improvements, to benefit all Minnesotans for years to come.

I want businesses everywhere in Minnesota to feel wanted, valued, and appreciated by everyone in our Administration.

I have asked the heads of our Departments of Agriculture, Natural Resources, the IRRRB, and the Tourism Office to work closely with businesses in those important industries, which are so vital to our state's prosperity, especially in Greater Minnesota.

I want to thank Jason Thormodson, an 11 year-old future farmer and mechanic from Madelia, for reminding me yesterday how very important agriculture is to our state.

DEED Commissioner Mark Phillips will have overall responsibility for our business outreach; and I have asked him to revitalize the former Star Cities for Economic Development program, which I inherited, as DEED Commissioner, from the Administration of Governor Al Quie.

Governor Quie is here today, and I want to honor him for his outstanding service to our state as our Congressman, our Governor, and our leading citizen.

His Star Cities program trained local officials, Chambers of Commerce members, college and university

presidents, and other civic leaders, to work in partnership and lead their cities' economic growth efforts.

Those local economic development teams need to be better supported by state officials, and I promise that their efforts will be given the highest priority by everyone in our Administration.

I will be personally available to assist them in any way I can. I thank Representative Fabian for asking me to join him and Senator Stumpf at North Star Agri Industries' recent groundbreaking in Hallock.

I appreciate Representative Hamilton and Senator Magnus inviting me to Jackson for AgCo's exciting expansion, which will bring over 100 new jobs to our state.

I stand ready to go anywhere in our state, nation, or world where there are jobs to be gained for Minnesota, and to assist the businesses who provide them.

And I am especially grateful to our Super-Volunteer, Senior Advisor Kathy Tunheim, and my good friend, Tom Borman, who will help me reach out to Minnesota's business leaders.

Some will criticize me for proposing next week to ask those successful businessmen and women and other wealthy Minnesotans to pay higher taxes.

I ask them for their forbearance during this fiscal crisis, which I did not create, but inherited, and now, with you in the Legislature, must solve.

I ask Minnesota's business leaders and other most successful citizens to give us two years to turn this Ship of State around. Not by savaging essential public services, upon which you and your employees also depend, but rather by transforming the ways in which government operates here in Minnesota.

And, with your help, to reduce the need for those services by putting people back to work throughout our state.

My Father's favorite quote was from The Bible. "To whomsoever much has been given, of him shall much be required."

You have achieved so much. I ask you, please, to help your state, your children and grandchildren, your friends and neighbors, to regain what you and I have enjoyed so much and benefitted from so greatly during our lives here in Minnesota. Please – help us restore Minnesota to greatness.

I invite you to contribute your expertise to help us regain that greatness – at the state level, and at the county, city, township, and school district levels.

Adopt a school. Volunteer in one of them. Teach a social service agency how to become more cost-efficient. Help the legislature and me to balance the state's budget more wisely. Contribute your ideas, your talents, and your wisdom. We need you now more than ever.

In closing, I ask all Minnesotans for the same forbearance. I ask not to be finally judged by the budget I am required to submit next week.

I ask you to remember that I was not given a blank slate on which to write my best proposals for our state's future. Neither was the Legislature. We were left a horrendous fiscal mess, a decade of economic decline, and state agencies poorly managed.

All of that must be turned around. All of it will be turned around, but not by tomorrow, and not entirely by the end of this legislative session.

WE WILL, however, TURN IT AROUND – and move Minnesota ahead once again – to reclaim our former greatness.

I approach this monumental assignment with the utmost dedication and determination. I know Lt. Governor Prettner Solon and our exceptional Cabinet do as well.

I believe our 201 Legislators feel that same awesome responsibility.

I urge them to approach their difficult decisions, as I do, with caution and care.

We will be properly judged by effects of our decisions and actions on the lives of our fellow Minnesotans - - this year, next year, and for years to come. Whether we make their lives better or worse.

Together, we must shape a strategy that will create a better Minnesota, for all of us and for all who will follow us.

We must reverse Minnesota's past decline. And return our state to a path of growth, success, and prosperity.

We can; we must; and we will.

By all of us working together. . .

To get Minnesota working again.

GUIDANCE ON STATE OF THE STATE GALLERY GUESTS

EDUCATION

ROBERT BRUININKS – President, University of Minnesota

JAMES MCCORMICK – Chancellor, Minnesota State Colleges and Universities

RYAN VERNOSH – 2010 Teacher of the Year (St. Paul, MN)

Ryan Vernosh was named 2010 Teacher of the Year. He is a 6th grade teacher at Maxfield Magnet School in St. Paul, where he has taught since 2006; and has served in the St. Paul Schools since 2004.

DR. EFE AGBAMU – 2010 Secondary Principal of the Year (Cottage Grove, MN)

(EFF-ay Ah-ba-moo) Dr. Agbamu is currently Principal at Park High School in Cottage Grove, where she has served for four years. Previously she was Principal at Highland Park High School in St. Paul. She was selected as the 2010 Secondary Principal of the Year.

JIM SONJU – 2011 Science and Mathematics Principal of the Year (Rochester, MN)

(SAN – juu) James Sonju is principal at Rochester's Lincoln K-8 Choice School. He was named the Minnesota Elementary School Principal's Association "Science and Mathematics Principal of the Year."

NATIONAL GUARD

COL. ERIC KERSKA – Commander of the 1st Brigade Combat Team (34th Infantry Division – Red Bulls) (Rochester, MN)

Col. Eric Kerska assumed command of the 1st Brigade Combat Team on July 1, 2009. He will lead the 1st Brigade when they deploy in May in support of Operation New Dawn, the drawdown phase of U.S. military operations in Iraq. In his civilian career, he is a battalion chief for the Rochester Fire Department. He is joined by his wife, Tina.

THE WENZEL FAMILY (Hastings, MN)

1st Sergeant Gary Wenzel, his wife Cathy and their 18 year-old son, Private First Class Todd Wenzel are from Hastings, MN. Gary has been deployed twice; Cathy was inspired by his service when she founded "Project Backpack," which provided backpacks for military kids; and started the non-profit organization "Minnesota Veteran Family Support," a clearing house for providing families with available services before, during and after a military deployment.

Their oldest child, Andrew, is a Specialist in the Active Duty Army on his way to Afghanistan and Todd, who just finished Basic Training last October, will be deploying as an Infantry soldier with the 1st Brigade Combat Team later this spring. Their other children include 15 year-old Devin, 13 year-old Makalia and 6 year-old Kelsie.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

ADAM BAILEY – 2010 Police Officer of the Year (St. Paul, MN)

Officer Adam Bailey has been with St. Paul Police for 6 years; previously he served with the St. Louis Park Police for 2 years. He was named MPPOA's Police Officer of the Year for 2010, and has been awarded St. Paul's highest honor – the Medal of Valor.

OTHER DISTINGUISHED GUESTS

Mayor RT Rybak (Minneapolis, MN)

Mayor Nancy Carroll (Park Rapids, MN)

Commissioner Duane Bakke (Fillmore County)

Council member Richard Brainerd (City of Mahtomedi)

All 24 members of Governor Dayton's cabinet