



Ms. Carol Frisch, Past President, League of Women Voters Minnesota
Appearing Before Legislative Salary Commission
Friday, February 10, 2017 at 9:00am
Room 230 Judicial Center
Dr. Thomas Stinson, Chair
Contact: Greg Hubinger
651 296-2963 or greg.hubinger@lcc.leg.mn

TESTIMONY

Good Morning and thank you Dr. Stinson and members of the Commission for the opportunity to speak with you this morning. My name is Carol Frisch. I am a past president of the League of Women Voters Minnesota and I was asked to present the League's positions on the role the salary plays in attracting candidates to the job of Legislator.

The League of Women Voters Minnesota represents 1,800 members all across Minnesota. The League a 98-year tradition of nonpartisan political advocacy and has never endorsed a candidate for office or a political party.

My testimony this morning is based on four parts of our Program for Action, as approved by our members. Specifically, LWV Minnesota:

- Believes that efficient and economical government requires competent personnel.
- Supports realistic compensation for legislators.
- Supports improved methods of financing political campaigns in order to enable candidates to compete more equitably for public office and promote citizen participation in the political process.
- Supports equality of pay.

As our panelists this morning have noted, being a legislator is not a part-time, January – May job, nor is it an 8-5 Monday through Friday job. Legislators work 365 days a year with some of those days being 18 or more hours long and others being perhaps as brief as responding to a few emails and phone calls from constituents or colleagues.

Being a legislator requires a depth of knowledge across many subject areas, a huge capacity for understanding the inter-relationships that exist between constituencies, state departments and agencies, federal, state and local governments, and matters of policy and finance. The responsibility of representing your district by listening, responding, and reporting to constituents is yet another critical role. The scope of this job description is daunting.

Another challenge facing a potential candidate for the Legislature is the distance from St. Paul. For State Senator Kent Eken, the author of the legislation that created this panel, being a legislator means a 265 mile drive each way from his Norman County family farm,

being away from his family all week, renting living quarters in St. Paul, missing his kids' school activities, and eight hours of driving time each week.

Turning for a moment to pay equality, how do you measure that? If we view the job of a legislator as we do every other job, how then can we attract competent, qualified candidates for office? Offering a competitive salary that recognizes the skills and sacrifices a legislator makes is a starting point.

Nate Silver's respected website 538.com published an article entitled , "[How Much Should State Legislators Get Paid?](#)"¹ in April 2016. They cite a Minnesota state Senator's pay plus per diem as averaging \$41,805 and a member of the House receiving \$39,325 in 2015 — that's 32% less than our median household income of \$61,481.

Your role as Commissioners is to determine reasonable pay for legislators. Yes, some legislators own their own business or have employers who can give these legislators the time off the job demands. But, for many who might otherwise be qualified and interested in running for office, the low pay combined with job requirements, is a very real barrier to their participation in government. "Low pay also puts limits on who can realistically serve in a legislature... It's no surprise, then, that state lawmakers tend to be older than their constituents," notes Boise State University political scientist Gary Moncrief in the 538.com piece.

In that same 538.com article, Peverill Squire, a University of Missouri professor of political science and an expert on state legislatures, found that the state legislatures that meet for longer and give their legislators more resources (both in terms of staff and salary) are more efficient, passing a greater percentage of bills overall and enacting more bills per legislative day. They have more contact with constituents and are more attentive to their concerns. They are also more independent, both from party leadership and the governor, and more likely to take on government reforms and enact complex and innovative policies. "When you compensate a legislator well and give them a staff, they're able to put more time into their work and actually develop some knowledge around different policies," Squire said.

The article goes on to ask, "Should voters listen when state legislators ask for more money? Neil Malhotra, a professor of political economy at Stanford University, said his research shows that when legislators ask for raises, they are responding to the demands of an increasingly complicated job. In his view, when lawmakers ask for more pay, they're not promising to work better or more efficiently — they're asking to be compensated adequately for what they're already doing.

"It's all relative, of course," Moncrief said. "Legislators in low-population states where the legislature only meets a couple of months do not need to be paid six figures. But virtually all political scientists who've looked at this issue would agree, I think, that most legislators are underpaid for the work they do." His co-author, Squire, suggested that at a minimum, legislative pay be pegged to the state's median household income.

It is not the League's role here today to advocate on behalf of any particular method of determining legislative pay. Instead, I am here today as a citizen advocate representing

¹ <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/how-much-should-state-legislators-get-paid/>

the League of Women Voters Minnesota in asking that legislative pay be set at a level that makes the job of being a legislator one that allows our legislature to compete in a highly competitive marketplace for talent, expertise and experience against other professions that do not carry similar burdens of responsibility to constituents.

The League of Women Voters Minnesota strongly encourages you to consider setting reasonable pay that will attract the most highly-qualified candidates to represent their constituents in St. Paul. In closing, I will leave you with a final quote from the 538.com study and Neil Malhotra at Stanford, "It's really irrational," he said. "We don't want to equip politicians with the resources to do their jobs, and then we blame them when things don't work the way we want."

Thank you for this opportunity to share with you the position of the League of Women Voters Minnesota on how legislative pay affects the ability to attract qualified candidates. Thank you for representing the citizens of Minnesota in your new role as members of a commission created by the voters.