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GOP leaders: Our Minnesota agenda

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What a difference a year makes.

Last January, there was more than a foot of snow on the ground, the state was facing a \$5.2 billion budget deficit, and Gov. Mark Dayton and the DFL were calling for huge tax increases.

This year, we have no snow to speak of, there is an \$876 million budget surplus, and Dayton and the DFL are declaring job creation the No. 1 priority of the 2012 session.

While we share the goal, we differ in our approach. The one-time stimulus funding and short-term jobs proposals proposed by Dayton and the DFL fail to invest in a strong and competitive private-sector economy.

Our economic recovery is too important to become just another line item in the state's biennial budget that is continually subject to change.

Republicans in the Legislature are focused on the long-term structural needs of our state. Our Reform 2.0 agenda was developed with the input of Minnesotans.

We spent the last five months traveling the state, driving thousands of miles to dozens of cities to meet with hundreds of job providers, local government officials, educators and citizens to listen to their ideas on what government can and should do better.

This session, we will restore confidence in our economy to foster private-sector job growth, improve education to provide a highly skilled workforce, and make government more-efficient and cost-effective through reform.

Business owners aren't looking for government handouts. They need government to get out of the way and allow them to do what they do best -- create jobs.

Our reform agenda will focus on creating a more competitive tax climate, reduced regulatory burdens, fewer mandates and rules, and reduced government interference in order to get our economy back on track.

There is literally no aspect of our economy that isn't dependent on a high-quality workforce.

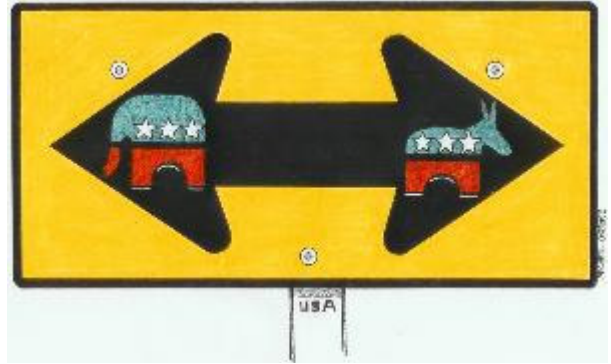
In Minnesota, almost one-third of the new job growth in this decade will be in science and math fields. However, these new jobs will not exist unless we reform our education system.

As part of Reform 2.0, we will continue to push for strong teacher evaluations, pay linked to teacher and student performance, and the removal of barriers to get rid of bad teachers. Seniority privileges should not trump student achievement.

We will also give serious consideration to granting the mayors in Minneapolis and St. Paul mayoral control of their respective school districts. In addition, we will support an aggressive plan to turn around the lowest-achieving schools in Minnesota and will allow for aggressive replication of high-performing charter schools.

Health care is another key area of reform. A year ago, state spending on health care was growing at an astronomical rate of 37 percent. Today that growth is 6 percent due to difficult decisions made last session.

This session our health care reforms focus on streamlining government management of health care to further reduce costs and deliver quality service, reforming welfare so our standards parallel those of our border states, and putting people -- not the



government -- in charge of their health care.

We are 20 years behind in streamlining government, and Minnesota taxpayers are paying for it every day. This session we will continue our push to make government more effective for the people it serves and those who pay for it.

From local government mandate relief and outcome-based spending to consolidation of administrative and back-office functions, our reforms will seek out and eliminate waste.

We will also support a great idea we received while out on the road: require city and county governments to present budget and spending information in an easy-to-understand format designed to educate taxpayers and engage citizens in local government spending decisions.

In 2011, many good reform ideas were put on hold as we grappled with the budget (and the snow). Today we're pledging to make 2012 the year of reform.

This is not a partisan agenda. It's Minnesota's agenda -- an agenda we can't let rest.

Kurt Zellers, R-Maple Grove, is speaker of the Minnesota House. Matt Dean, R-Dellwood, is House majority leader.

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