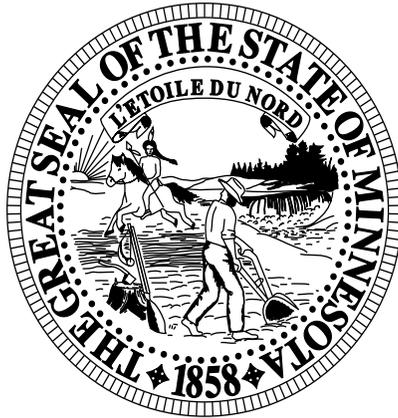


Minnesota



Legislative Manual

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Dedication of Blue Book

To my fellow Minnesotans:

I'm honored to present the 2015-2016 edition of the Minnesota Legislative Manual – also known as the “Blue Book.” As always, the Blue Book is a comprehensive guide to our government in Minnesota. But it's more than just a listing of offices, names, and biographies. It also contains interesting information about Minnesota's history, culture, institutions, and profile. Since my days as a student, growing up in Hopkins, Minnesota, I've been a regular user of the Blue Book. I hope this edition will continue to be a trusted resource for people all over Minnesota, as it has been since the 1870s.

I'm pleased to dedicate this edition of the Blue Book in honor of the 50th anniversary of the Voting Rights Act and the Minnesotans who made it a reality. A core mission of the Office of Secretary of State is to protect and strengthen the right to vote, so honoring the passage of that landmark legislation, as well as the Minnesotans who fought tirelessly for equality and justice, is fitting and important. When President Lyndon Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act into law in 1965, he called it “a triumph for freedom as huge as any victory that has ever been won on any battlefield.” Before the law, many states openly suppressed the votes of African-Americans and other communities of color. They used poll taxes and literacy tests, not to mention brute force and intimidation, to deny certain citizens the right to register to vote. The Voting Rights Act made those tactics illegal, and in doing so brought millions of Americans out of the shadows by bringing an end to their silence. As a nation, we didn't just make a promise; we made it *the law* to give millions of Americans a voice – by ensuring that they could exercise their right to vote.

There's a compelling Minnesota story surrounding the Voting Rights Act. While it may not seem so now, in 1965 the legislation was controversial. And the 1965 debate on the bill came in the midst of other divisive debates on the Vietnam War, immigration, and federal spending. But when the roll was called on the Voting Rights Act, Minnesota spoke with one voice. All of our members of Congress – Democrats and Republicans – voted “YES,” affirming the fundamental right for all Americans to have a direct voice in their government. That unity was rare, but it came in service of an important principle. And it reflected well on all of Minnesota.

It's important that we honor those members of Congress from Minnesota who did the right thing back in 1965: Senators Walter Mondale and Eugene McCarthy, as well as Representatives Albert Quie, Ancher Nelsen, Clark MacGregor, Joseph Karth, Donald Fraser, Alec Olson, Odin Langen, and John Blatnik. It's equally important to honor the many people with Minnesota ties, too numerous to mention entirely here, whose tireless work for civil rights raised the consciousness of a nation and made the Voting Rights Act possible; pioneers such as Roy Wilkins (NAACP Executive Director), Josie Johnson (civil rights leader and education advocate), John Cummins (retired minister of First Universalist Church in Minneapolis), Jim Kloster (retired Lutheran minister from Clearbrook), Kenneth Beck (Reverend at St. Cloud First United Methodist Church, who passed away in 2006), Thomas Basich (founding pastor of Advent Lutheran Church, who passed away in 2011), and James Reeb (Unitarian minister, and St. Olaf graduate, killed for his civil rights work at Selma, Alabama). History has judged them all kindly.

Throughout this edition of the Blue Book, you'll find more information about the Voting Rights Act, and about the role that Minnesotans played in its passage.

While we celebrate the passage of the Voting Rights Act, let's not forget that there's more work to do. Although Minnesota is consistently among the top states in voter turnout, even more of our people should exercise their hard-won right to vote. As long as I'm privileged to hold this office, I will work with anyone of any political affiliation, from any part of our state, to enhance and expand the ability to vote for all Minnesotans.

Steve Simon
Minnesota Secretary of State



Reader's Note: Included in the 2015-2016 Legislative Manual are historical artifacts, such as news articles, quotes, and published letters from the 1960s about the events leading up to the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. As readers will see, the language used and printed fifty years ago to describe the struggles faced by African-Americans and other communities of color is considerably different than today. The Secretary of State's Office, in consultation with the Saint Paul NAACP, felt it was important for Minnesotans to read these sources of information as they were written in 1965, not only for historical context but so Minnesotans can better understand how far we've come and how far we have yet to go.

Steve Simon
Minnesota Secretary of State

Jeffry Martin
Saint Paul NAACP, President

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