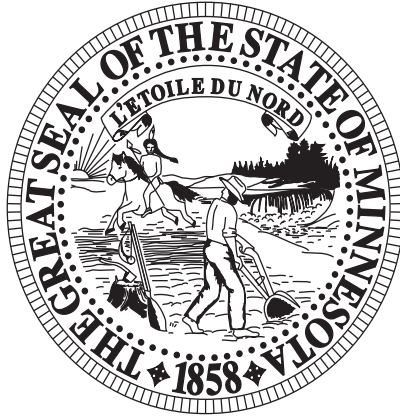


Minnesota



Legislative Manual

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Dedication of Blue Book

The Right to Vote, Cornerstone of Democracy

This Blue Book is dedicated to you, the voters of Minnesota. Thanks to your devoted civic engagement we consistently lead the nation in voter turnout.

As citizens we make our voices heard by exercising our constitutional right to vote. Our nation's founders waged an armed struggle against Great Britain not to win the right to establish a new form of monarchy, but to create a new form of government — a representative democracy “of the people, by the people and for the people,” as Lincoln noted at Gettysburg 150 years ago this November.

While our voting rights are guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution, each state has some discretion in administering elections. Some states have everyone vote by mail as is the case in more than 500 Minnesota townships. And in most states, citizens can vote prior to Election Day at county courthouses and city halls. In Minnesota we call this “in-person absentee voting.” Election law changes almost always produce lively debate — helping ensure balance and compromise in changing the way we exercise “the right that protects all other rights.”

Last year our right to vote here in Minnesota was subject of much debate. Citizens weighed in on a constitutional amendment related to elections, legislators discussed new voting restrictions, and federal and state courts issued significant opinions on a wide range of right-to-vote issues.

U.S. District Judge Donovan Frank was asked to review the constitutionality of Minnesota's Election Day voter-registration system (*Minnesota Voters Alliance, et al v. Ritchie, et al*). In the early 1970s, state legislators had a spirited debate over whether a voter-registration system should be imposed statewide. Many argued against it as a potential barrier to voting. The compromise they came up with was requiring voter registration but with a procedure developed by Wyoming allowing eligible citizens to register on Election Day. More than a dozen other states have adopted similar laws, all of which enjoy a much higher voter turnout than states that have not adopted same-day voter registration.

In his opinion, Judge Frank affirmed the constitutionality of Minnesota's election law system — including same-day registration — and stressed that it was a primary responsibility of our government to do everything in its power to protect the right to vote. Nearly 528,000 Minnesotans benefited from his ruling in the November 2012 elections, making use of Election Day voter registration to update their addresses or register for the first time. Another significant judicial decision that affirmed our right to vote was made by Minnesota District Judge Jay Quam regarding the rights of Minnesota citizens in a guardianship relationship (*In re the Guardianship of Brian W. Erickson*). In this case, the person who had entered into a guardianship agreement with a local non-profit sought to clarify his right to vote as a citizen. Judge Quam affirmed this right and declared that any effort to restrict the right to vote of Minnesotans in guardianship relationships was not allowed under the U.S. Constitution.

While it is the citizens who keep Minnesota number-one in the nation in voting, this great success is only possible thanks to the dedicated efforts of the more than 30,000 Minnesotans who serve as volunteer election judges, and the thousands of local officials that provide efficient and safe polling places. Thanks to their efforts we set another voter turnout record in 2012.

I am grateful to the generations before us who secured and defended our right to vote — and created our great system of election administration that protects both our constitutional right to vote and the integrity of the process. They have bequeathed to us a system that we work vigilantly to protect and improve. Future generations will be grateful that we have kept Minnesota's democracy strong and they will, I believe, continue our tradition of leading the nation in civic engagement.

The right to vote cannot be overemphasized. In these eloquent yet simple words, Judge Quam captured the essence:

“The importance of this right cannot be overstated in a democratic system where voting is an act of self-definition and an expression of deeply held personal beliefs. It is also not solely a personal right without the potential for great societal consequence...the votes of a few can change the course of our nation.”

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark Ritchie". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'M'.

Mark Ritchie
Minnesota Secretary of State

Foreword

The Blue Book received its name due to its content, not its cover color. Bartlett's Dictionary of Americanisms explains the term "Blue Book" as "a printed book containing the names of all persons holding office under the Government of the United States."

The Minnesota Blue Book is published biennially in odd-numbered years under the direction of the secretary of state. The 2013-2014 edition contains statistical, historical and constitutional information about the state of Minnesota. It also provides information on state, federal, and local government elected officials and agencies.

I would like to thank all of the state, federal and local government officials, state agency, judicial and legislative staff, and the Office of the Secretary of State staff who have contributed to the 2013-2014 edition. A special thank you to the Minnesota Historical Society and Minnesota Legislative Library for helping provide the voting rights materials.

Mark Ritchie
Minnesota Secretary of State

Minnesota Legislative Manual

Contents

CHAPTER 1 — Minnesota In Profile

Minnesota in Profile	2
Vital Statistical Trends	3
Population	4
Education	5
Employment	6
Energy	7
Transportation	8
Agriculture	9
Exports	10
State Parks	11
National Parks, Monuments and Recreation Areas	12
Diagram of State Government	13
Political Landscape (Maps)	14
State Symbols	22
Historic Sites	27
Governor’s Residence	28

CHAPTER 2 — Founding Documents

Declaration of Independence 1776	30
Constitution of the United States of America 1787	33
Continental Congressional Act: Northwest Ordinance of 1787	45
Organic Act of 1849	50
Authorizing a State Government for Minnesota 1857	56
Admission of Minnesota into the Union 1858	58
Constitution of the State of Minnesota 1858	60
Amendments Proposed to State Constitution Since 1858	79

CHAPTER 3 — State Legislature

Minnesota Legislature	90
Members of the Senate	94
Members of the House of Representatives	95
State Legislative Districts Map	97
Legislators, District Maps and Contact Information	98
Legislative Committees	
Senate	232
House	235
Legislative Employee Offices	
Senate	239
House	242
Legislative Rules	
Senate	244
House	258
Joint Rules	274
Joint Legislative Agencies and Legislative Commissions	278
Media with Offices in the Capitol	282

CHAPTER 4 — State Executive Offices

Governor 286
Lieutenant Governor 287
Attorney General 288
State Auditor 289
Secretary of State 290
Executive Councils and Boards 292
Executive Officers Since Statehood 293

CHAPTER 5 — State Agencies

Bureau of Mediation Services 298
Department of Administration 298
Department of Agriculture 300
Department of Commerce 300
Department of Corrections 302
Department of Education 303
Department of Employment and Economic Development 304
Department of Health 305
Department of Human Rights 305
Department of Human Services 306
Department of Labor and Industry 307
Department of Military Affairs 308
Department of Natural Resources 308
Department of Public Safety 309
Department of Revenue 311
Department of Transportation 311
Department of Veterans Affairs 312
Housing Finance Agency 314
Iron Range Resources and Rehabilitation Board 315
Minnesota Management and Budget 315
Minnesota Pollution Control Agency 316
MN.IT Services 318
Office of Higher Education Services 318
Minnesota Public Postsecondary Educational Institutions 319
Minnesota State Colleges and Universities 320
Boards, Commissions and Other Agencies 323

CHAPTER 6 — State Judiciary

Judiciary in Minnesota 350
Minnesota Supreme Court 351
Minnesota Court of Appeals 353
Chief Justices of Minnesota Supreme Court Since Statehood 358
Chief Judges of the Minnesota Court of Appeals 358
Minnesota District Court 359
Judicial-related Agencies 382

CHAPTER 7 — Local Government

Counties 386
Metropolitan Council..... 430
Regional Development Commissions 430
Cities..... 431
Townships..... 442
School Districts 442

CHAPTER 8 — Federal Government

President of the United States 452
Vice President of the United States..... 452
President’s Cabinet 452
Minnesota’s U.S. Senators 453
Minnesota Congressional District Map..... 454
Minnesota’s U.S. Representatives 455
Supreme Court of the United States..... 459
U.S. Court of Appeals 460
U.S. District Court..... 460
Office of the U.S. Attorney 461
Presidents and Vice Presidents of the United States..... 462
Minnesotans in Congress Since Statehood 463
Minnesotans on U.S. Supreme Court Since Statehood..... 468

CHAPTER 9 — Tribal Government

Minnesota’s Federally Recognized American Indian Tribes..... 470
State Tribal-related Agencies 472

CHAPTER 10 — Minnesota Elections

Minnesota Election Results History
Voter Turnout Since 1950..... 474
Gubernatorial Election Results Since 1857 476
Presidential Election Results Since 1860 481
Minnesota Election Results 2012
Special Primary and Special Election Results Since Last Edition 484
August 14, 2012, State Primary 499
November 6, 2012, State General Election 506
2012 Minnesota Presidential Electors..... 507
Precinct-level Results..... 517

INDEX 647

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