Minnesota Rep. Jenifer Loon
Former congressional staffer has brought passion for service and expertise in economic development to the state Capitol

by Kate Tormey (ktormey@csx.org)

**Bio-sketch: Rep. Loon**

- first elected to the Minnesota House in 2008 and represents Eden Prairie, in the suburban Twin Cities
- currently serving as deputy minority leader
- 2009 graduate of CSG Midwest's Bouhag Institute for Legislative Leadership Development (BILLD)
- holds a bachelor's degree from Augustana College
- married with two children

Q: You're currently working on a bill that would lift a state ban on the sale of liquor on Sundays. Can you talk about why it's an important issue?

A: I am working on ... allowing local governments to make those decisions rather than the state. It's part of continuing work on things that allow small businesses and entrepreneurs to be successful.

Q: Another bill you're currently working on would repeal some tax increases put in place last year as part of a larger revenue package. Which policies are you targeting for repeal and why?

A: There were three business-to-business taxes that have caused a lot of heartburn among the business community: taxes on the warehousing of goods, on repair of equipment and on telecommunications equipment.

Our sales taxes are reasonably high in Minnesota. We don't tax everything, but on the things that are taxed they are pretty high — upward of 7 percent. That is a pretty hard hit to the bottom line of businesses.

And regardless of your opinion on whether higher taxes are good, bad or neither, business-to-business taxes are pretty generally recognized as not the best way to go about levying taxes. You want to do it at the end point, or at the consumer's end, because those taxes do eventually end up making their way to the consumer anyway — as an increase cost of goods and services — or to the detriment of employees in the form of lower wages or less-generous benefits. ...

It has become a pretty bipartisan priority for the session to repeal those taxes. I have introduced a bill to do that, and some of my colleagues have done so as well.

There was another tax change put in place recently: We instituted a gift tax. We are one of only two states in the country that do that. It has caused some concerns for people who are planning their giving or the passing on of money or real estate or something else of value to family members.

Minnesota is a wonderful state in many ways, but our climate is not one of them.

Q: You're also proud of legislation that helped pave the way for small beer brewers to expand their businesses. What did the bill include?

A: I sponsored a "tap room" bill in 2011. We had some very small craft brewers who were getting a following for their product, but they wanted to open a destination brewery — like a winery, where you see how the product is made and go to a tasting room. This has become popular with beer connoisseurs.

In more than half of the other states, you could open a "tap room" and sell a glass of the beer that you make at that brewery on-site to a customer. But our laws did not allow that; they had very strict lines between manufacturing, distribution and retail operations. As long as the city ordinance allows it, the new law removes the state prohibition. You still cannot go into the brewery and pick up a six-pack, but you can purchase a glass and enjoy it there.

What it has done is unleash whole new businesses in Minnesota. More than 30 craft breweries have started in Minnesota, and more than half of them have tap rooms. Distribution for some of these small craft brewers is small, so this is a way of building consumer interest and loyalty in their product.

There was worry it would impact other sellers and bar owners, and that really hasn't come to pass. There has been only one upside to it: more jobs and more businesses.

Resource for Rep. Loon: Other Reps and Senators might also be interested in the fact that the Minnesota Senate has approved a bill to allow open carry of long guns.

Another bill Loon is working on would remove a prohibition on allowing those with permits to carry a concealed weapon in the state Capitol. Under the current law, those with permits to carry a concealed weapon are not allowed to put the gun in a holster and carry it on the premises, even if it is not visible.

Q: Do you have children?

A: Yes. My daughter is19 years old and my son is 17 years old. They just graduated from college.