



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 30, 2011

Contact: Greta Bergstrom, 651.336.6722, greta@takeactionminnesota.org

TAKEACTION MINNESOTA ENDORSES FOUR CANDIDATES FOR ST. PAUL CITY COUNCIL

Council Vote Over Cossetta's Living Wage Exemption Determining Factor in Organization's Backing Three Challengers

St. Paul, MN -- TakeAction Minnesota announced its endorsements of four candidates in races for St. Paul City Council this year. They include **Jim Ivey** in Ward Two, **Russ Stark** in Ward Four, **Amy Brendmoen** in Ward Five, and **Bee Kevin Xiong** in Ward Six. Stark remains the sole incumbent endorsed by TakeAction Minnesota, while Ivey, Brendmoen and Xiong all are posing challenges to incumbents Dave Thune, Lee Helgen and Dan Bostrom, respectively.

Candidate screenings in two wards produced no endorsements, given a legitimate split amongst members between incumbent Melvin Carter III and Johnny Howard in Ward One, and between Chris Tolbert and John Mannillo in Ward Three, the city's only open seat this year.

Dan McGrath, TakeAction Minnesota's Executive Director, said this year's member endorsement decisions largely boiled down to City Council votes this spring which provided a living-wage waiver to Cossetta's Italian Market for their expansion. The waiver exempts the business from having to pay some of its workers a \$10.16 per hour living wage in exchange for nearly two-million in city loans. TakeAction Minnesota's predecessor organization, Progressive Minnesota, fought hard to pass the ordinance in 2005 and McGrath said its members intend to see it upheld. Russ Stark was the only council member to vote against the waiver while TakeAction Minnesota past-endorsees Carter, Thune and Helgen voted for the exemption.

The living-wage ordinance, as well as the candidates' positions on ranked-choice voting which will be featured for the first time on November's ballot, were both cited by members as the two top factors in driving candidate preference in this year's screenings. "Our members are serious about holding our endorsed leaders accountable and the

Cossetta's vote angered a lot of our members -- especially those motivated to turn out to our candidate screenings this year," McGrath said. "Opposition to Instant Runoff Voting, which TakeAction Minnesota has supported at the local level, also was persuasive."

TakeAction Minnesota's Board Chair, Mark Schultz, said the screening process included broad turnout from across the organization's membership. Schultz remarked that this fall's council screenings represented "some of the largest and most diverse screenings ever." Nearly two-hundred members, more than a quarter of whom were persons of color, attended.

McGrath said this year's city endorsements represent a shifting political landscape from city endorsements of past years where the organization had to combat a slew of conservative candidates supported by former St. Paul Mayor Randy Kelley. "What we're seeing now is incumbents like Helgen and Thune being challenged from the left rather than the right. Were they to face conservative opponents in screenings this year rather than progressive opponents, our members may have chosen to endorse them again. But that wasn't the case and our members had strong progressive challengers to support. The political landscape in St. Paul is trending leftward."

TakeAction Minnesota's PAC Board plans to screen City Council President Kathy Lantry in the coming weeks. Lantry remains unopposed in Ward Seven.

###