



# PREFACE

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In 1999, Mitch Pearlstein, founder and president of Center of the American Experiment, and Annette Meeks, the project’s director, led an effort to create the *Minnesota Policy Blueprint*, a comprehensive analysis of virtually every aspect of state government, complete with recommendations. At the time, it represented what was perhaps the most ambitious project ever undertaken by a regional think tank. Its success was so far-reaching that copies of that book can still be seen in the offices of state legislators some 15 years later.

As members of the Center’s board of directors, we agreed with the urgency that it produce another *Blueprint*. We had all watched how the 2013 and 2014 sessions of the Minnesota legislature exposed lawmakers who were trapped in the priorities of the past.

Instead of innovating ways to deliver more value to Minnesota taxpayers, lawmakers addressed a \$600 million budget deficit by raising taxes by \$2.1 billion. Instead of making the education system more accountable and accessible to parents and students, lawmakers predictably chose policies that favored unions. And instead of identifying how to better connect people with solid well-paying middle-class jobs, lawmakers upped the minimum wage.

We knew these attitudes would persist until a strong alternative policy vision would capture the hearts and minds of Minnesotans. This *Blueprint* sets up that vision with wide-ranging policy recommendations aimed to enable *all* Minnesotans to thrive in their personal and financial pursuits.

It’s worth noting that the chapters that follow are not traditional “academic” white papers. They were written to appeal to broad public sensibilities. They do

not merely *admire* problems, but drive practical, deliverable policy solutions.

We think these proposals represent a comprehensive and thematically consistent first step toward building a culture of prosperity in Minnesota. We call it a *Prosperity Agenda*—an agenda to deliver real hope and change to all Minnesotans.

To us, prosperity includes a whole array of benefits that help Minnesotans achieve a rich and fulfilling life. Economic success is only part of it.

- It means enabling *all* Minnesotans to raise their families in a safe and healthy and fulfilling environment.
- It means creating opportunities and incentives for personal enrichment.
- It means rewarding hard work, personal responsibility and individual initiative.
- It means access to jobs—*well-paying* jobs.

Quality jobs sustain our culture and our economy. Minnesotans believe in work. Work contributes to the sense of dignity and self-reliance that is the best-known antidote to entrenched poverty.

Someone once said, “Work is the elixir of life.” We’ve also heard it said that the best housing policy is a job, that the best education policy is a job, that the best healthcare policy is a job, and the best family policy is a job.

We agree. But our emphasis is on *quality* jobs. If people are forced to work ungodly hours at multiple jobs, with no benefits, and no time for their families, we *aren’t* adding to the Minnesota’s culture of prosperity.

Issues are important. Every Minnesotan should have the tools, the framework, and the opportunities they need to achieve their full potential.

We want to see policies that enable Minnesota to achieve its full potential. Because if it does, all Minnesotans will get an opportunity to achieve their full potential—economically, socially, across all aspects of the spectrum of what constitutes prosperity.

Minnesota has long been an economic powerhouse. The foundations of our success have been powered by our diverse economy, our location at a crossroads of commerce, our civic engagement and our industrious, entrepreneurial, and well-educated workforce.

But we can never forget that past economic success does not guarantee future returns. The State faces new challenges from increasing global competition, aging demographics, declining education outcomes and weakening families. No one is suggesting Minnesota is no longer a state that works, but Minnesota needs certain course corrections to meet and overcome future challenges.

## MINNESOTA POLICY BLUEPRINT

We believe the *Minnesota Policy Blueprint* delivers a comprehensive package of course corrections that steer Minnesota back toward the economic, personal and cultural prosperity all Minnesotans want to pass on to the next generation.

*Chuck Spevacek and Ron Eibensteiner both serve on the Board of Directors at Center of the American Experiment, where each has served as chairman. Spevacek is a partner at Meagher & Geer, a Minneapolis law firm. Eibensteiner is president of Wyncrest Capital, a Minneapolis-based venture capital firm.*