

Good afternoon.

It's nice to see so many of you here to show your support for such a critical issue.

In the middle of this hectic legislative session, let's not forget that health disparities affect far too many Minnesotans.

We all like to be proud that Minnesota ranks as one of the healthiest states in the nation.

Yet here are some facts that we're not so proud of in Minnesota:

- Infant mortality rates in the African American and American Indian populations are two to four times higher than for the white population.
- The infant mortality rate for the American Indian population is actually going up.
- The rate of diabetes for American Indians in Minnesota (and Wisconsin) is 600 percent higher than for whites.
- While white teens in Minnesota have one of the lowest pregnancy rates in the U.S., African American teens have one of the highest.
- While teen pregnancy rates are falling in general, Chicano/Latino/Hispanic teen pregnancy rates are increasing in Minnesota.
- Asians are three times more likely to die of homicides and higher rates of stroke.

We need to work together to figure out why these disparities are occurring.

My vision is that everyone in Minnesota must have an equal opportunity to enjoy good health.

That's why I'm proclaiming the week of April 28 through May 6, 2001 "Eliminate Health Disparities" Week.

Finally, I am sure that many of you remember Lou Fuller, who built the Office of Minority Health within the Minnesota Department of Health. She passed away on April 17. Lou has been described as a "tireless champion and dedicated advocate for the health and well-being of populations of color and American Indians." She will be missed.

Thank-you.