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SEPTEMBER 11, 2018

TRANSPARENCY WATCHDOGS TO SURVEY CANDIDATES ON OPEN GOVERNMENT

Are candidates for Minnesota state offices committed to government transparency so that citizens can hold elected officials accountable? We asked them in a poll sponsored by the Minnesota Coalition on Government Information and the Minnesota Chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists.

The seven questions in the poll speak to issues that have been of great concern to Minnesotans. The questions, listed below, were sent to all candidates for the Minnesota Legislature as well as to candidates for governor, attorney general, secretary of state and auditor.

“We are very concerned that Minnesota’s public institutions, once known as models of good government, have become less transparent and increasingly willing to deny the public timely and critical public information” said Gary Hill, Chair of the MNCOGI Board of Directors. “All of the other issues that are important to voters depend on transparency,” said Board Member Sharon Schmickle. “When government operates in secret, voters can’t be sure how candidates truly will stand on critical issues.”

Poll responses will be distributed before the November election to media organizations for use in news stories and opinion pieces about candidate stances on issues. Non-responses to the full questionnaire or to any individual questions will be reported as well.

MNCOGI and the Minnesota Chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists urge voters to contact the candidates and ask them to participate in the poll. Further, voters could pose the same questions directly to the candidates in person and at campaign events.

In conjunction with the poll, MNCOGI is making available to the public a spreadsheet of contact information for candidates of this year's general election races in Minnesota. This spreadsheet, containing public data provided by the Office of the Minnesota Secretary of State, is available online at bit.ly/2018-mn-candidates .

Here are the poll questions:

Do you support prohibiting state government from requiring non-disclosure agreements in settlements of alleged sexual harassment and other misconduct of legislators or employees?

Do you support making public any House or Senate ethics committee reports on investigations of the conduct of members?

Do you support making the Legislature subject to the open meetings and open records laws that currently apply to counties, cities, school districts and other government bodies?

Do you support making police body cam video as public as squad car camera videos which are more accessible to the public?

Do you support the currently allowed use of cameras in Minnesota court rooms?

Do you support requiring that government emails be preserved beyond the current minimal limits?

Would you support strengthening the economic interest statements filed by public officials, bringing them in line with most other states – for example adopting the requirement they disclose household financial information beyond the direct earnings and holdings of the public official?

CONTACTS:

Gary Hill
ghillgary@gmail.com
763-420-8670

Sharon Schmickle
sschmickle@gmail.com
612-285-5805