

Good evening.

It's great to be in Fairmont.

Actually, you don't know how glad I am to be here.

Let's see, I got up at 5 o'clock this morning, flew to Willmar, did a town meeting, met with the editorial board of the West Central Tribune, had coffee with Trena in Clara City, went shopping in downtown Granite Falls, stopped by the Farmers' Co-op grain elevator in Cottonwood, had lunch with the Rotary Club in Marshall, visited with the kids at Murray County Schools in Slayton, toured a telephone company in Fulda, had a meeting with the mayors and city councils of Windom, Jackson and Lakefield, and in between met with 5 mayors and did interviews with at least 10 reporters.

I'm tired, but I'm glad to be in Fairmont.

It's my last stop of the day and my staff tells me that they're going to let me sleep for a few hours and that I don't have to get up until 5:30 a.m.

And then, of course, I get to do the same thing all over again.

There are some things that they didn't tell me about before I signed up for this job.

Seriously though, I am honored to be here tonight to meet with the people who have worked so hard to make Fairmont a great regional center of business activity in this great state.

When I introduced my Big Plan for the State of Minnesota in October, I said that future success in Minnesota will depend heavily on our ability to strengthen regional cities like Fairmont. I said that we need healthy and vital communities in greater Minnesota in order to provide opportunity and hope for families that want to live and work in the comfort and beauty of rural Minnesota.

In my conversations today with mayors, community leaders and citizens, I have been emphasizing how important it is for us to work together to build those healthy and vital communities.

I emphasized how important it is that all Minnesota towns and cities are connected by good roads.

I emphasized how important it is that all Minnesota towns and cities be connected by high speed telecommunications networks.

And finally, I emphasized how important it is that the people of all Minnesota towns and cities have the opportunity to actively engage in their government without hassle, without barriers, and without confusion.

I have five of my commissioners with me today.

- Transportation Commissioner El Tinklenberg
- Commerce & Public Service Commissioner Steve Minn
- Trade & Economic Development Commissioner Jerry Carlson
- Agriculture Commissioner Gene Hugoson and
- My Commissioner of Administration, David Fisher.

They have been working hard, together, to develop very specific proposals that will give life to the principles, values and visions of my Big Plan.

They have developed an initiative that will finally give you the relief you deserve from paying ridiculously high amounts of money for your car license tabs.

On Monday, I announced a transportation plan that will not only give you tax relief, but will finally put the sales tax you pay when you buy a car into a transportation and transit fund that will go to building a system that is good for all of Minnesota.

In fact, it will go a long way toward continuing to build transit systems in rural Minnesota like the Kandiyohi Area Transit System that I rode from the Willmar airport to the Kandi Mall this morning.

Another very important proposal that my commissioners have worked to develop is my Telecommunications Strategic Initiative that is designed to create competition and make sure that everyone in Minnesota has access to state-of-the-art high speed technology.

We want all communities in Minnesota to be as aggressive in pursuing state-of-the-art telecommunications as Fairmont has been.

I can't say enough about how forward-looking you have been.

The fact that Fairmont has installed a fiber optic telecommunications system that is up and running puts you in a cutting edge position to compete in this global economy and is why I want to use Fairmont as a role model for cities all across Minnesota.

And finally, in our effort to bring you the infrastructure you will need to be healthy and vital economic centers in rural Minnesota, we are not forgetting that to be successful, we need a government that will be:

Simple, so that you can easily, without hassle and confusion, follow the legislative path of these proposals,

Accessible, so that if you choose to participate in the actual legislative process you are given that opportunity with relative ease, and

Accountable, so that when the dust has settled and the votes are taken it is done in full view of the people.

That government, in my view, is a single house, unicameral legislature.
In less than one month the legislature will convene to consider three very important issues:

Telecommunications reform -- that will help bring a whole new world of opportunity to cities all over Minnesota,

Transportation reform -- that will cut taxes on tabs and create new sources of revenue for improved highways in rural Minnesota, and

Government reform -- that will bring more accountability, easier access and save millions of tax dollars by going to a single house legislature.

I urge you to get involved, because in the end it is the people who must decide. And when it comes to how you are governed, it is imperative that you be able to decide.

Fairmont is a great city.

It is a city that has a great reputation for hard working people, good schools, good health care systems, and advanced telecommunications capabilities.

Fairmont is a vital retail center that does over \$400 million in retail sales a year and supports these sales with a diversified economy including food packaging, technology, and equipment manufacturing.

You have much to be proud of, but looking ahead there is always more to do. Everyday the world changes and presents new challenges.

But working together and working hard, we will not fail.

Thank you.