

Welcome to Minnesota!

Maybe I should say "welcome HOME to Minnesota" - because so many Scandinavians live here that it might just feel like home to you.

In fact, some of the thousands of Scandinavians that live here may be related to you.

I'm told that we've got more Finns living here than any other state but Michigan.

Around the turn of the last century - Finnish Americans were the largest foreign-born group in northeastern Minnesota. They came to farm, to work in the timber industry and to operate the iron ore mines that became the backbone of the U.S. steel industry.

You should be proud of your country's contribution to the moral fiber and work ethic of our Minnesota people.

In the United States Minnesota has a reputation for nice people. Well, that Minnesota Nice label surely must have some roots in our Scandinavian heritage.

So you should feel right at home.

Minnesota is about the same size as Finland - and of course we have the same mild winters that you do!

But Minnesota has much more to offer - including the best climate to grow your high-tech business.

So I'm pleased to welcome you to this conference - and I thank you for giving us the opportunity to tell the REST of our story. Because Minnesota is a great place to live and do business.

I don't say that just because I'm the governor. I'm also a big "fan" of Minnesota. I tout our quality of life, beautiful amenities and bright, hard-working people everywhere I go.

And I'm not alone.

Last year, Minnesota was ranked the "Most Livable State" in the country for the fourth year in a row by an independent research company. The rankings are based on qualities such as health, income, housing, education and recreational facilities.

So it's no secret: Minnesota has much to be proud of, and I can think of three reasons WHY:

Our ENTREPRENEURIAL spirit,

Our DIVERSE economy, and

The RESILIENCY of our people.

We have a wonderful spirit and rich history of entrepreneurship in Minnesota.

We spawned the medical device industry

Performed the first open-heart surgery,

Invented the blood pump and the cardiac pacemaker.

Believe it or not, we even invented water skiing and manufactured the first rollerblades.

Minnesota is home to such industries as agribusiness, medical technologies, telecommunications, and a growing travel and tourism industry.

We build boats and bake bread and write books.

We mine ore and make sugar.

Our economy is diverse and it is strong.

Strong because it is supported by a well - educated, hard - working and resilient workforce.

In this tight labor market, many companies are finding these workers OUTSIDE the Twin Cities metropolitan area -- international companies like Entronix, based here in Minneapolis.

Entronix expanded into northeastern Minnesota and now has a thriving business in Eveleth. 200 people work at its electronics re-manufacturing plant, repairing - among other things -- Nokia cell phones.

Minnesota IS a great state for business - but you should know that we're not resting on our laurels. We are here to build on them. We are here to prepare for the future.

And what is the future of the business economy?

You know the answer as well as I do -- it's an economy with a rebuilt foundation of technology, globalization and a highly skilled, highly motivated workforce.

And technology is huge.

Because technology and our ability to provide telecommunication services plays a very large role in keeping business and industry competitive in our global economy.

We have a plan - a VISION for Minnesota that includes:

Healthy, Vital Communities

Self-sufficient People

Service - NOT Systems

And Minnesota: World Competitor

It's called the Big Plan because it doesn't look one - or even five - but TWENTY years into the future.

And it contains many initiatives designed to ensure that Minnesota is not left on the wrong side of the "digital divide" -

That our workforce is prepared for the high-skilled jobs of today - AND tomorrow,

That long-term infrastructure needs - transportation, telecommunications, housing - are met to keep Minnesota attractive for business growth,

That EVERYONE in Minnesota has access to State-of-the-art technology - and high speed Internet service.

And finally that we have a tax system that fair to business and encourages investment in Minnesota.

So you are in friendly territory. You might even think of it as "coming home".

And if things go the way I hope they do over the next two days - some of you WILL be calling Minnesota home very soon.

You would be making the right decision.

Thank you.