

A resolution relating to ethical conduct; conduct of
Senator Gretchen M. Hoffman.

WHEREAS, the Subcommittee on Ethical Conduct of the Committee on Rules and Administration, in response to complaints submitted by Senator Ann H. Rest dated May 20, 2011, and May 27, 2011, met on June 13, 2011, to consider whether the conduct of Senator Gretchen M. Hoffman in regard to a statement that Senator Hoffman published online in response to statements made by Senator Barb Goodwin during Senate floor debate on May 18, 2011, constituted a violation of Senate Rule 56.2; and

WHEREAS, the Subcommittee on Ethical Conduct has found that the May 27, 2011, complaint states the following facts that are not in dispute:

1. On May 18, 2011, during the Senate floor debate regarding the conference committee report on S.F. No. 760, Senator Goodwin made the following comments concerning health care for people with disabilities:

"This is how far we've come: the way state institutions used to be, they were called 'Institutions for idiots, imbeciles, and the insane...' "

"and that's what it said, right, right on the hospital - 'idiots, imbeciles, and the insane.' "

2. During the same speech, Senator Goodwin continued her remarks:

"We might not have the ten state 'Hospitals for the idiots and the insane and the imbeciles' like we used to, but that's because a lot of people put a lot of hard work and logic into how to develop the absolute basic services that we need in our communities."

3. After Senator Goodwin concluded her remarks concerning S.F. No. 760 on May 18, 2011, Senator Hoffman published the following statement at approximately 7:30 p.m. through the Twitter online communication service:

“#Sen Goodwin just called people with mental illness - idiots and imbeciles - while debating HHS bill #offensive #mndfl# #mnsr #mnleg”

4. Senator Hoffman subsequently released the following statement to the press:

“On Wednesday, May 18, Senator Barb Goodwin referred to people with mental illnesses as idiots and imbeciles on the Minnesota State Senate floor. As a registered nurse who has worked with patients with mental illnesses for many years, I was offended by her remarks. I shared Senator Goodwin’s remarks with my Twitter followers.

Until the Subcommittee on Ethical Conduct completes their work, I have no further comment.”

WHEREAS Senator Hoffman's counsel acknowledged at the June 13, 2011, hearing of the Subcommittee on Ethical Conduct that Senator Hoffman was present on the Senate floor during the entire time Senator Goodwin made remarks in the debate concerning S.F. No. 760; and

WHEREAS Senate Rule 56.2 provides that "A member shall not publish or distribute written material if the member knows or has reason to know that the material includes any statement that is false or clearly misleading, concerning a public policy issue or concerning the member's or another member's voting record or position on a public policy issue;" and

WHEREAS, the Subcommittee on Ethical Conduct, based on the foregoing facts that are not in dispute, has drawn the following conclusion:

1. Senator Hoffman had reason to know that her written statement concerning Senator Goodwin's comments on S.F. No. 760, published online through the Twitter Internet communication service on May 18, 2011, was clearly misleading with respect to Senator Goodwin's position regarding the public policy concerning the treatment of individuals with mental illnesses and disabilities, in violation of Senate Rule 56.2.

NOW, THEREFORE,

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Subcommittee on Ethical Conduct:

1. Senator Gretchen M. Hoffman shall deliver a written apology to Senator Goodwin.
2. Senator Hoffman shall remove her original statements concerning Senator Goodwin's comments regarding S.F. No. 760 from her Twitter account.
3. Senator Hoffman shall provide a description of and a link to an online posting of this resolution on her Twitter account.
4. Upon compliance by Senator Hoffman with the requirements of this resolution, the chair of the Subcommittee on Ethical Conduct shall dismiss the complaints.