

Minnesota Legislative Preview - 2012 Session

By [Christine M. Zimmer](#) on January 16, 2012

On Tuesday, January 24, the 2012 Minnesota Legislative Session convenes. This is a capital bonding session which means the legislators will focus on passing a bonding bill for major state projects -- Bricks and Mortar -- such as road construction, higher education buildings and building maintenance for state owned properties. It is also an election year. All 201 legislators in the Minnesota House and Senate are up for election. Governor Dayton will not stand for election until 2014.

Redistricting occurs every 10 years, coinciding with the US Census. Legislation passed in the 2011 session redrawing legislative district lines was vetoed by Governor Dayton at the request of DFL legislative leaders. Since no bill has become law, litigation has been initiated to draw the district boundaries. The district maps will be announced by the Supreme Court on February 24. Currently, legislative districts have 36,000 people per district; due to population growth of 7.8 percent, new districts will have 39,582 people.

The new district lines mean that some current legislators have to run against each other. In some situations, new districts will be created with no incumbent member. Many members will have significantly new looking districts and will need to meet a large number of new constituents.

When session convenes on January 24, the Republicans will continue to lead the House and the Senate with small majorities. The DFL has control of the executive branch with Governor Mark Dayton and his cadre of commissioners in charge of State departments and agencies. In general, there will be time for 8 to 12 committee hearing dates for most committees given the House proposed April 30 adjournment date. Negotiations over the legislative schedule continue between the House and Senate and an earlier adjournment date is possible. No deadlines for action on bills by committees have yet been set.

Leadership Changes

GOP Majority Leader Amy Koch (R-Buffalo) stepped down as leader of the Senate Republican Caucus in mid-December. The Senate Republican Caucus elected a new leader, Senator David Senjem (R-Rochester). Senjem served as leader for the Senate Republican when they were in the minority from 2006 until 2010. He is a consensus builder. Four Senate members have been elected by their caucus as Assistant Majority Leaders -- Roger Chamberlain (R-Lino Lakes), Paul Gazelka (R-Brainerd) and Ted Lillie

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(R-Lake Elmo) – all being freshmen Senators. Senator Claire Robling (R-Jordan), serving in her fifth term and current Chair of the Senate Finance Committee, was also elected to the leadership team.

Senjem appointed two members to leadership positions: Sen Julianne Ortman (R-Chanhassen) will serve as Deputy Majority Leader. She is also Chair of the Senate Tax Committee. Sen Bill Ingebrigtsen (R-Alexandria), who chairs the Environment and Natural Resources Committee, was also appointed. When asked about the Senate Majority's goals for the 2012 session, Senator Senjem replied, "We will continue to focus on jobs, reforming government, and being good stewards of the taxpayer dollars."

On the Budget

The State's November 2011 budget forecast showed a surprising and dramatic improvement in the State's fiscal situation. The 2011 budget session dealt with a \$5 billion budget deficit that produced a long drawn out 2011 session, a special session and a three-week government shutdown. The November 2011 forecast projected an \$876 million budget surplus for the remaining biennium which runs until June 30, 2013.

This surplus creates a much different type of session. Since there is a surplus and not a deficit, there is no immediacy for budget action. The bonding bill will be a big part of the session, but now, other issues can be considered such as the Vikings Stadium.

Constitutional Amendments / Ballot Initiatives

With all the acrimony and party polarization, constitutional amendments have become an increasingly popular avenue to pursue to get policy adopted. Already on the ballot for the general election this November is an amendment to define marriage as only between a man and a woman. This will certainly bring voters to the polls. Other amendments being considered include requiring the use of an ID in order to vote, limiting the Legislature's ability to raise taxes and adopting right to work requirements.

The 2012 Session has lots of potential for high drama with the leadership changes in the Senate, the budget surplus, a strong interest in building a Vikings Stadium, the high profile issue of the expansion of gaming, redistricting and a re-election year for all 201 members. The Republican controlled Legislature wants a short session so as to get out on the campaign trail and the DFL Governor will want to campaign for a DFL controlled Legislature to take over in 2012.

It will be a contentious, fast paced session. We will bring you updates throughout the session.