

Minnesota Government Update

Posted by [Eric F. Swanson](#) on April 29, 2011

In the midst of nearly around the clock work on policy and budget bills, the Legislature nonetheless took up two highly controversial bills this past week. Here's an overview of the week that was and the forecast for next week --

Constitutional Amendment on Marriage

Three Republican Senators introduced a constitutional amendment that would allow Minnesotans the opportunity to vote on the definition of marriage in the 2012 election. Senators Limmer (R-Maple Grove), Hann (R-Eden Prairie), and Gazelka (R-Brainerd) want to ask voters to define marriage as solely between one man and one woman in Minnesota. In a hearing on Friday that allowed one hour for proponent testimony, one hour for opponent testimony, and one hour for committee discussion, many religious and community leaders took the opportunity to voice their opinion on the issue. Senator Hann stated in a press release, "I believe that it is best to let the people decide rather than a small group of legislators in St. Paul. By putting this definition of marriage on the ballot, we can ensure that this decision will accurately reflect the values that Minnesotans believe in."

Voter ID Bill

SF509 authored by Senator Limmer (R-Maple Grove), also known as the Voter ID bill, passed the Senate with a 37-26 vote. Senator Limmer said this bill offers election integrity by ensuring that people are who they say they are. The DFL spoke out against the bill saying the bill unfairly affects the disenfranchised – the homeless, victims of domestic violence and the elderly, to name a few. Senator Hoffman (R-Vergas) spoke in support of the bill retelling a story of when she went to vote in the last election. Her deceased father-in-law was still on the voter roll in her district and he passed away in 2007. The House bill, HF210, authored by Representative Kiffmeyer (R-Big Lake), is awaiting action in the Civil Law Committee.

Policy Deadline

Friday marked the second deadline of the 2011 legislative session. To remain viable, a bill must have gone through all necessary policy committees in either the House or Senate. In order to meet the deadline, this week brought long hearings and long agendas, many going late into the evening. Getting on the calendar of the necessary committees was no small feat as many committees spent the majority of their hearing time putting together omnibus policy bills. Competition was fierce for room reservations and members time as omnibus finance conference committees also met throughout the week.

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Coming up

Significant work remains on most policy and budget bills. Next Friday is the final deadline of the session. For a bill to remain alive after next week (absent a trip to Rules Committee), it must have traveled through all necessary committees in the House and the Senate, so it will be another week of long days and longer nights. In addition, a Vikings Stadium bill may get its first hearing of the session. Should make for an interesting report next week!