

Boilermakers' Legislative Update

Last Thursday Governor Dayton, Majority Leader Tom Bakk (D-Cook) and House Speaker Kurt Daudt (R-Crowne) reached agreement on the legislative issues left unresolved at the end of the 2015 legislative session. Then, on Friday the legislature met in Special Session to pass the bills Governor Dayton had vetoed at the end of the regular session i. e. Agriculture and Environment; Jobs and Energy; and K-12 Education with the agreed to language; as well as the Bonding and Legacy bills that were not passed before the 2015 session adjourned.

Notwithstanding the verbal agreements on the language to be included in each of the Special Session bills, the Environment and Jobs bills continued to be controversial. The Environment bill continued to be criticized as reversing long standing environmental protections. The provisions coming under the heaviest fire were the elimination of the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency Board and an exemption for non-ferrous mining from Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) solid waste rules. Despite attempts to remove these objectionable sections, the final bill included both of these provisions. The bill also included language delaying the implementation of the wild rice water quality standard pending further work by the MPCA; and language establishing an incentive program to provide payments for the production of advanced biofuels.

Objections to the Jobs and Energy bill centered on several energy provisions. In the end, the final bill provided for Minnesota Power and Ottertail Power to propose special competitive rate schedules for energy-intensive, trade exposed customers like paper mills, mining companies and other large energy users. Safeguards were put in place to minimize the new rates' impact on low-income residential customers.

As noted in an earlier legislative update, the Legislature wanted to require legislative approval for the MPCA's plan for complying with the federal Clean Power Plan to regulate greenhouse gas emissions. The amended language requires the MPCA and the Department of Commerce to submit the draft plan for review and comment to the House and Senate committees with jurisdiction over energy policy. The language lifting the prohibition on new nuclear facilities was not included in the final bill.

On the jobs front, the Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) was directed to develop and administer customized training programs with Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU). The training programs will integrate skilled manufacturing industries with academic instruction and job-related learning in the workplace

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