

End of session accomplishments

Written by State Senator Bobby Joe Champion
Thursday, 22 May 2014 15:22



On Wednesday, May 21, 2014 the Legislature adjourned Sine Die with many accomplishments, and because we must compromise, there are a few things I am not 100% pleased with. We came into the legislative session with the first budget surplus in decades. The \$1.2 billion surplus allowed legislators to look at various ways to invest in needed programs while making sure our budget remained on stable footing.

Some of the highlights of the session include:

Expungement: I am proud to be the chief author of legislation to clarify and create a balanced mechanism for those who were either charged or convicted of crimes to have their records expunged. The legislation aims to maintain public safety while allowing those who have served their time to have their records sealed so they can more easily secure employment and housing.

Tenant Victim of Violence: I also was a co-author on legislation to remove barriers for tenant-victims to break a lease if necessary for their safety, prohibits eviction because the tenant was a victim of violence, and extends protections to tenant-victims of sexual assault and stalking. This is a good bill that extends protections currently available to victims of domestic violence to victims of sexual assault and stalking.

Bonding: Although I am not happy with all the provisions in the bill, as a bonding committee member I am pleased the \$20 million appropriation to re-envision and rebuild Nicollet Mall was part of the final deal. This project will support the next generation of our very important downtown's economic growth.

Hit and Run Bill. Another important bill passed this session addresses a loophole in current law that says a driver does not have to stop and investigate what they hit in a crash if they do not know it was a person or a vehicle. This loophole acts to encourage drivers in collisions, particularly those who are impaired or negligent, to leave the scene of an accident and then claim in court they did not know what they struck. Minnesota drivers will now have to stop and "reasonably investigate" what was struck in instances where a driver knows or has reason to believe a collision has occurred. The legislation is supported by the Minnesota County Attorneys Association, the Minnesota Sheriffs Association, Minnesotans for Safe Driving, Mothers Against Drunk Drivers (MADD), the Bicycle Alliance of Minnesota and the Minnesota Alliance on Crime.

I would be remiss if I didn't talk about the budget. The legislature approved more than a half billion dollars in direct tax relief for nearly two million Minnesotans statewide. The tax breaks

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come in the form of income, property and sales tax relief and will put more money in the pockets of Minnesota homeowners, renters, businesses, farmers and local governments. Specifically, Senate Democrats supported targeted tax relief for working families, college students and recent graduates, teachers and married couples. By creating a tax system that is fair for everyone, Minnesota can stimulate a healthy business climate and a growing middle class.

• **Northside Achievement Zone** received a \$350,000 for next year and another \$400,000 for 2016-2017 in the budget bill. I'm a strong supporter of this great program that works so hard to end poverty in North Minneapolis. The program support hundreds of low-income families and are making strides in closing the achievement gap and ending multigenerational poverty. The program implements a two- generation approach focused on community-wide education for children as well as a strong support system for parents. I am proud to support funding for this much-needed program.

Senate Democrats passed a \$276 million supplemental budget package to address most of what remained of the projected surplus. The bulk of these investments focused on enhancing education opportunities from pre-K to college and providing much needed support for home- and community-based healthcare providers. Additional funding went to repairing roads damaged over the long winter and bolstering job growth initiatives around the state.

As I look back on the 2014 session, I am hopeful the measures enacted by the DFL legislature and Governor Dayton this year will build on this momentum and ensure a brighter future for our children and grandchildren.