

Strange 2024 Legislative Session Comes to Messy Conclusion

Minnesota lawmakers have adjourned a very contentious and at times controversial legislative session after passing a slew of omnibus bills on the final weekend of legislative activity. DFL leaders in both House and Senate, accusing minority Republican members of delaying votes on omnibus budget bills, resorted to combining several remaining bills into one wide-ranging omnibus bill. The massive 2,860-page bill combined provisions dealing with a slew of different budget and policy jurisdictions including taxes, transportation, housing, labor, energy, human services, paid family leave, and even some new restrictions on gun policy. While some of the bills had been seen in previous forms in both chambers, the new bill did include tax policy that had yet to be discussed or seen by members, and with time running out, the DFL majority passed it with less than 20 minutes of debate in either body over roars and objections from Republicans.

While finger pointing and recriminations are the norm for the final weekend of legislative sessions, this year certainly felt different. Minority party leaders were furious at the tactics used to force a vote on DFL priorities and gave scathing quotes to reporters. Many longtime lobbyists and legislative staff expressed concerns of the lasting damage that might have been inflicted in how the two major parties work together moving forward.

Even before the chaotic ending to the session, relationships between DFLers and Republicans had become quite strained. Two years of being in the minority in both chambers of the Legislature and out of power in the Governor's office had worn on Republicans. They were not included in end of session negotiations and, without controlling any branch of state government, were unable to influence policy or budget decisions.

After a DFL Senator was arrested for burglary in early April, things got even more tense. The fallout from the high-profile arrest of Senator Nicole Mitchell threw the entire DFL agenda for the 2024 legislative session into uncertainty. The DFL controls the Senate chamber by a single vote, having a 34-33 majority. Budget bills require only a simple majority to pass, meaning they need every single one of their 34 members to vote in order to move those bills off the floor. DFL budget chairs had already assembled their omnibus bills and had begun passing them off the House and Senate floors before this incident occurred. Those bills still needed to go through a conference committee process and then be repassed off each Chamber's floors in order to go to the Governor's desk for final approval.

Senator Mitchell was removed from her committee assignments and was not allowed to caucus with the DFL, but she continued to attend Senate floor sessions and cast votes that ultimately determined whether bills passed or not. The GOP Senate members brought an ethics complaint and numerous motions to try and force Senator Mitchell to resign, she resisted those calls and ended up playing an important role in final votes. While the state Senate is not up for reelection until 2026, Senator Mitchell's legal troubles could eventually result in her resignation before her term is up.

The list of legislative accomplishments is not nearly as long as DFL leaders had hoped, with major priorities such as a bill to put the Equal Rights Amendment on the ballot in 2026 and a package that

would fund public works projects not crossing the finish line. The Commerce Committees spent extensive time and energy on updates to the paid family and medical leave law that was enacted last year, those updates did make it into the final omnibus bill. Commerce Committee Chairs also focused heavily on attempting to legalize sports gambling, but common ground remained elusive and it did not pass.

As for AASP-MN's legislative efforts to clarify and strengthen the Regulations of Claims Act: Minnesota Statute 72A.201, our lobby team and Executive Director had productive meetings with rank-and-file lawmakers as well as the relevant committee Chairs but were unable to pass statute strengthening legislation this year. We did make inroads with the Commerce Committee in the Senate and will be working during the interim to continue advocating for common sense changes to help shops in their dealings with insurance companies on behalf of your customers.

While all members of the House are on the ballot this fall, we know the Senators that we'll be dealing with in 2025 so will be focusing our attention and efforts on meeting with them in the off season to help position our updates to Minnesota Statute 72A.201 for the next budget setting session in 2025. Our Government Relations team will be in touch with members who have Senators on the Commerce Committee to host shop visits this summer and fall.