

Co-op Day at the Capitol draws strong attendance again

More than 75 cooperative business directors, managers and staff met in St. Paul on March 15 for Cooperative Network’s annual Co-op Day at the Capitol. Nine cross-sector lobbying groups met with agency commissioners, caucus leaders and more than 50 legislators to share how certain proposals would affect their businesses and communities. Participants included Cooperative Network members from agriculture, credit union, dairy, electric, energy, farm credit, food and member-owned cooperatives throughout the state.

“This event brings together members from across the state and across the sectors we represent,” said Tom Liebe, Cooperative Network president and CEO. “Cooperative Network prides itself in unifying their voice and this event allows them to become actively involved in lobbying for important issues directly.”

Dayton Administration officials who addressed the group

included Dept. of Agriculture Commissioner Dave Frederickson, Dept. of Commerce Commissioner Mike Rothman and Dept. of Transportation Commissioner Charlie Zelle. Afternoon speakers included House Speaker Kurt Daudt (R – Crown), Senate Majority Leader Paul Gazelka (R – Nisswa), Senate Minority Leader Tom Bakk (DFL – Cook) and

Co-op Day continued on page 2

2017 Co-op Day Agenda

Among the legislative issues co-op leaders discussed at this year’s Co-op Day at the Capitol were:

- Support for reasonable legislative and regulatory environment for water quality
- Support for “local democracy” initiative for electric cooperative governance
- Support for property tax relief and fairness for cooperatives and their member-owners

- Transportation and infrastructure for roads and bridges
- Support for credit union flexibility for benefit of members
- Support for broadband access
- Participants also thanked legislators for the passage of a provision to enable an agricultural cooperative healthcare coverage option that was enacted earlier this session as part of a larger healthcare package.



Nine cross-sector lobbying groups met with more than 50 legislators to share how the above proposals would affect their businesses and communities. Pictures with the groups, from top left, are: Deputy Minority Leader Paul Marquardt (DFL – Dilworth); Senate Majority Leader Paul Gazelka (R – Nisswa); Senate Minority Leader Tom Bakk (DFL – Cook); and Rep. Tim Miller (R – Prinsburg) and House Agriculture Policy Committee Chair Paul Anderson (R – Starbuck).

Lawmakers address Farm Supply, Grain & Energy Committee

Cooperative Network's Farm Supply, Grain and Energy Committee met on March 16 in Bloomington, Minn., in conjunction with the Minnesota Statewide Managers meeting. Speaking to the group that day were House Environment and Natural Resources Policy and Finance Committee Chair Rep.

Dan Fabian (R – Roseau) and Agriculture Finance Committee Vice-Chair Tim Miller (R – Prinsburg). The gathering featured several timely agenda items, including a discussion about Cooperative Network's ongoing opposition to a legislative attempt to modify the tax exemption on agriculture containment facilities.

House and Senate pass omnibus bills before going on spring break

The past few weeks witnessed a flurry of activity on both the House and Senate floors as legislators passed their remaining omnibus budget bills in advance of the Easter and Passover break that started on April 7. With a current \$1.65 billion surplus, the next step for lawmakers when they return from their break on April 17 is to

convene conference committees comprised of members from both bodies of the legislature to debate the provisions in each respective omnibus finance and tax bill. House, Senate and Dayton administration officials will decide on what provisions will be included in the bills and which ones won't.

Timely topics covered at Cooperative Business Issues Conference

Cooperative Network hosted its annual Cooperative Business Issues Conference on March 20, just prior to the 2017 Minneapolis-based CoBank Customer Meeting in Bloomington. The program examined current business, regulatory and policy climates, and their implications and opportunities for cooperatives and their business activities. Attendees heard a thorough presentation on the status of

the Affordable Care Act and proposed alternatives; examined trade agreements in our current policy and political climate; explored how cooperatives have successfully deployed broadband in rural areas; and heard a cutting edge analysis of various federal regulatory measures that have been taken off the table and those that are still of interest to cooperatives. We are grateful for CoBank's sponsorship of this conference.

Co-op Day

Continued from page 1

House Minority Leader Melissa Hortman (DFL – Brooklyn Park).

"Member-owned cooperatives make significant contributions to improving the quality of life in Minnesota, and it is important that those shaping public policy hear about the positive impact of cooperatives and their members," said Matt Hughes, Cooperative Network vice president and Minnesota managing

director. "We are very grateful to all our cooperative members who took time to engage at the Capitol, and to all the lawmakers who took time to be with them."

Cooperative Network staff was also provided an opportunity to deliver remarks to the House Agriculture Policy Committee about Co-op Day at the Capitol. We remain grateful to several of our members for sponsorship of this event.

Annual Senior Cooperative Housing Conference approaching

The 17th annual Senior Cooperative Housing Conference will take place at the DoubleTree Bloomington – Minneapolis South in Minneapolis on May 1-2, 2017. This one-of-a-kind conference allows attendees to interact with senior cooperative housing leaders from across the region and get specific legal, policy, governance and community living information to address the issues that affect members and their cooperatives. Registration information is available at cooperativenetwork.coop. For more information, contact Vicky Chaput at (651) 280-4900 or vicky.chaput@cooperativenetwork.coop



Co-op scholarships available

The Minnesota Cooperative Education Foundation (MCEF), the nonprofit foundation arm of Cooperative Network, has announced its 2017 Edward Slettom Cooperative Leadership Scholarships. The scholarships are offered to high school, college, law, business and graduate school students interested in pursuing careers in cooperatives. Applicants must be Minnesota residents but do not need to attend a Minnesota institution of higher education. The application deadline is May 1, 2017. Cooperative Network members are encouraged to share this scholarship announcement in newsletters as well as on websites, bulletin boards and social media.