

## Cooperative healthcare coverage option for farmers signed into law

Cooperative Network-led language that would allow for the establishment of an agricultural cooperative health coverage option was signed into law by Governor Mark Dayton on Jan. 26. The provision was contained in a larger piece of legislation aimed at providing healthcare premium relief to assist in stabilizing Minnesota's individual insurance market, and several reform measures aimed at strengthening the individual market for 2018.

Authored by House Commerce and Regulatory Reform Chair Joe Hoppe (R – Chaska), and by Senate Health and Human Services Finance and Policy Chair Michelle Benson (R – Ham Lake), H.F. 1/S.F. 1 was passed by large bi-partisan margins in both bodies. While the agriculture cooperative health plan language was contained in



S.F. 1 as it moved through the committee process, it was added as an amendment to H.F. 1 during House floor debate by Rep. Tim Miller (R – Prinsburg).

The agricultural cooperative health coverage option language was included on the heels of many discussions that Cooperative Network, United Farmers

Cooperative (UFC), and others had with lawmakers and their staff over the course of several months leading up to passage. In fact, Cooperative Network, UFC and others have worked diligently for many years to see a similar plan put into place. Legislation was passed in 2007, 2010, and 2013 to achieve a similar goal, however, regulatory obstacles have prevented it from coming to fruition. Cooperative Network is grateful to all lawmakers, administration officials, staff, and other stakeholders who have worked to advance this effort.

Efforts are underway to get this healthcare option up and running as soon as possible. For more details or if you have questions about this healthcare option, please contact Matt Hughes at Cooperative Network at 651.228.0214 or matt.hughes@cooperativenetwork.coop.

## Electric sector meets; legislation in 2017 key topic

Cooperative Network's Electric Sector meeting was held on Monday, Feb. 13 in conjunction with the 2017 Minnesota Rural Electric Association (MREA) Annual Meeting in St. Paul.



Senator Dave Osmek

Senator Dave Osmek (R – Mound), Chair of the Energy and Utilities Finance and Policy Committee, and Representative Pat Garofalo (R – Farmington), Chair of the Job Growth and Energy Affordability Policy and Finance Committee

provided their perspectives on the 2017 legislative session, including several energy issues.

A Cooperative Network legislative and political update was provided, including an update on the new agricultural cooperative healthcare law and the MREA-led local democracy initiative.

Finally, an update on the work of the Minnesota Cooperative Education Foundation was delivered.



Representative Pat Garofalo

## Co-op Calendar

**March 15** – Co-op Day at the Capitol, St. Paul, Minn.

**March 16** – Farm Supply, Grain and Energy Committee Meeting, Bloomington, Minn.

**March 20** – Cooperative Business Issues Conference, Bloomington, Minn.

**April 11** – Co-op Directors Forum, Baraboo, Wis.

**May 1-2** – Senior Cooperative Housing Conference, Bloomington, Minn.

# 2017 Session hits fever pitch

## Budget surplus increases to \$1.65 billion

Since the 2017 Minnesota Legislative Session was gaveled in, the newly renovated state Capitol has seen plenty of action. With the Senate switching from DFL to Republican control, and the GOP-led House of Representatives increasing their majority, Governor Mark Dayton is embarking on his last two years at the state's top elected official.

The first year of each legislative biennium is dedicated to the passage of a state budget for the new two-year cycle. Brand new figures recently released by Minnesota Management and Budget (MMB) show that the state has a \$1.65 billion budget surplus, which is an increase \$250 million higher than the November forecast. The first year of each legislative biennial session is dedicated to the passage of a balanced state budget for the next two-year cycle. Gov. Mark Dayton released his budget recommendations in late January and deliberations have been ongoing in earnest in the

legislature, which includes 24 new representatives and 15 new senators.

Lawmakers must come to agreement on a balanced budget or risk a government shutdown like 2011. The GOP would like dollars to go back to taxpayers in some fashion. Passage of a long-term transportation finance bill and a tax bill are prime leftovers from the 2016 session that were not passed into law and remain at the top of lawmakers' legislative menus this session. Other key issues are more health care reform, regulatory reform, water policy, and energy policy. Another piece to the funding puzzle this year may be the passage of a bonding bill, which is for capital investment projects throughout the state. While large bonding bills are not typically passed during budget years, the lack of one during the 2016 session could mean passage of a robust bonding bill will play a role during end-of-session budget negotiations between the executive and legislative branches.

## CBIC early bird registration extended to March 15

Cooperative Network is hosting the annual Cooperative Business Issues Conference on March 20 in conjunction with the 2017 Minneapolis-based CoBank Customer Meeting. Senior staff and directors from electric, farm supply, grain, dairy, and

fuel cooperatives in Minnesota and Wisconsin, as well as other professionals who work with cooperatives, are invited to attend the conference, which will feature presentations by key industry experts and additional networking opportunities with fellow cooperative leaders. The program will take place prior to the start of the CoBank Customer Meeting.

Please contact Matt Hughes at (651) 228-0214 or matt.hughes@cooperativenetwork.coop or Ethan Giebel at (608) 258-4405 or ethan.giebel@cooperativenetwork.coop with any questions.

### Committee deadlines arriving

March 10 will mark what is known as the first committee deadline at the Capitol. The first committee deadline means that a bill must have cleared all policy committees in one body in order to remain alive for the session.

The second deadline arrives on March 17, which means bills must clear all policy committees in the other body in order to remain alive by the second deadline. The past few weeks and upcoming weeks will feature a flurry of committee activity on policy related bills.

Once the policy committees have completed their work, the focus will move towards the finance and tax committees. These committees must complete their work by the third committee deadline, which is set for Friday, March 31. All appropriations bills must have been passed by the appropriate committees by this date. While the 2017 session began on Jan. 3, it must adjourn no later than midnight on Monday, May 22.

### Co-op Day at the Capitol rapidly approaching on March 15, 2017

The 9th annual Co-op Day at the Capitol is scheduled for Wednesday, March 15, 2017. Cooperative leaders from across Minnesota come together for this annual grassroots lobbying event to meet with legislators and administration officials in St. Paul.

Joining throughout the day will be legislative leadership, state agency commissioners, and Secretary of State Steve Simon. Gov. Mark Dayton and Lt. Gov. Tina Smith have also been invited.

### Cooperative Network Dispatch

Prepared and distributed to provide timely information on matters pertaining to Minnesota's member-owned cooperatives.

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